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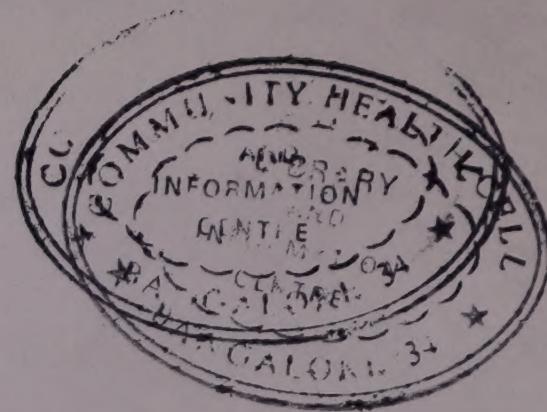
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30 December 1981 to 3 January 1982

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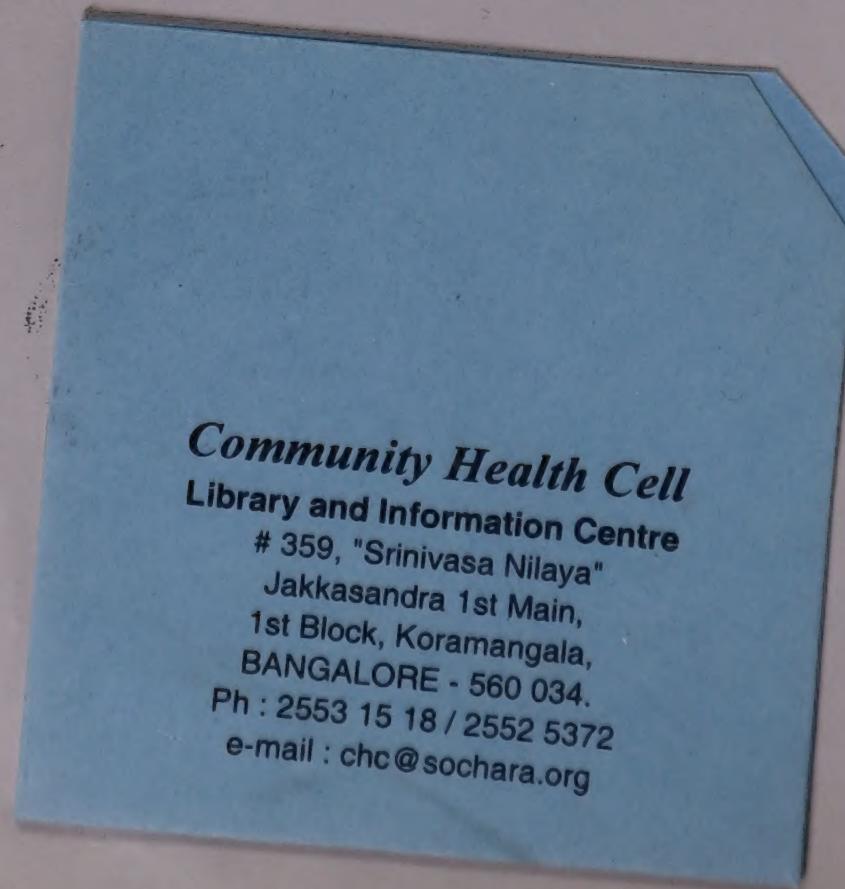
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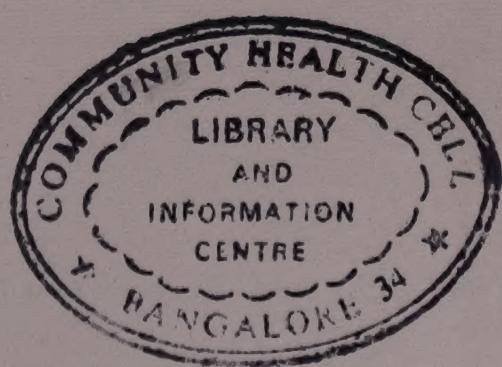
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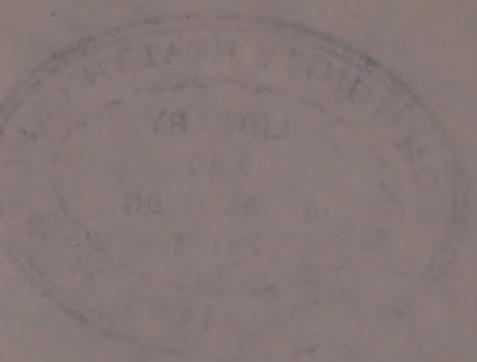
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REVIEW OF THE INDIAN PLANNING PROCESS  
30 December 1981 - 3 January 1982

PLANNING AND THE JUDGMENT OF ECONOMIC PROGRESS

by

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## PLANNING AND THE JUDGMENT OF ECONOMIC PROGRESS

### 1. Planning and Rights

The Planning Commission of India was set up in March 1950 by a resolution of the Government of India. The resolution invoked the Constitution of India and the "fundamental rights" of citizens as well as the "directive principles of State policy".

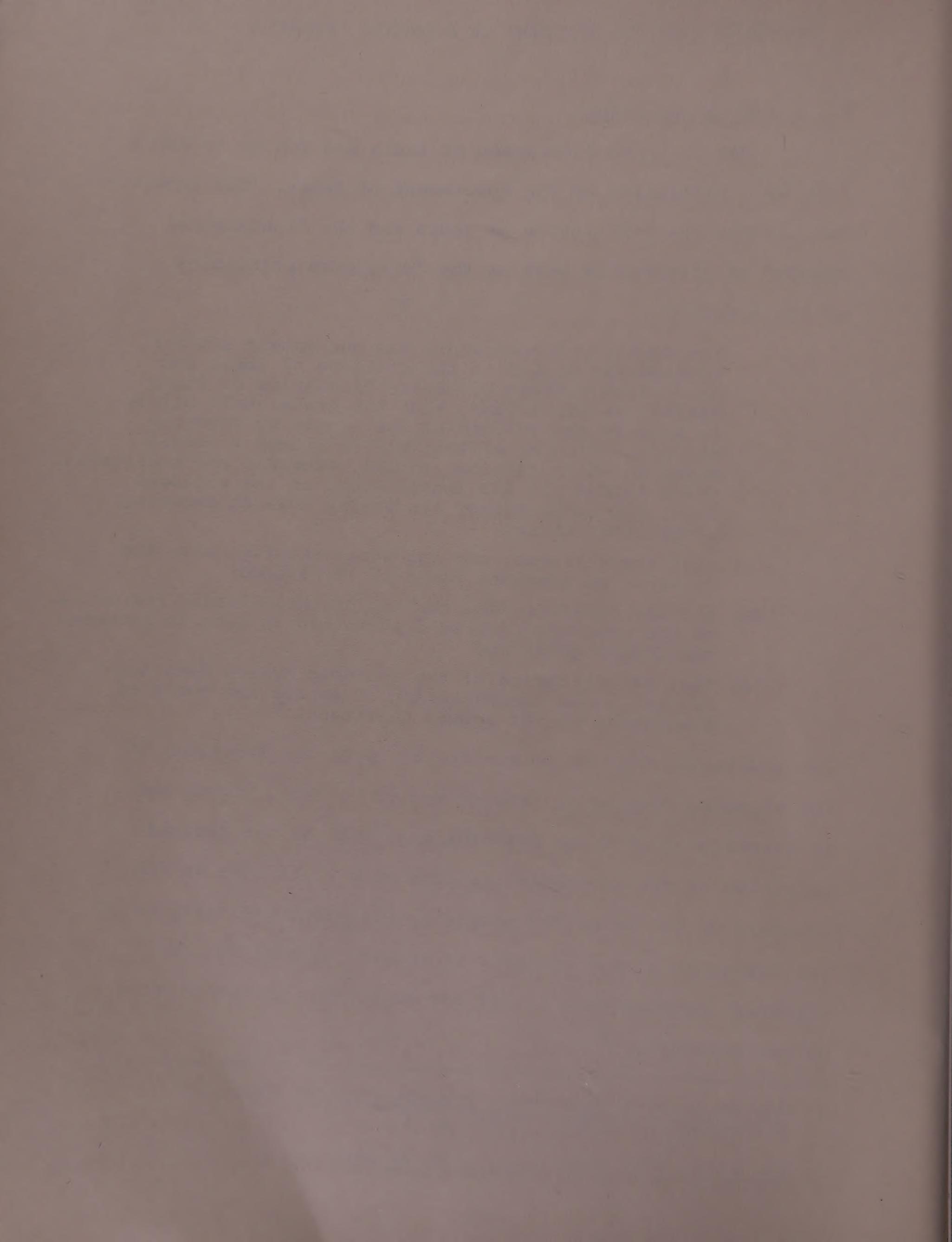
The Constitution of India has guaranteed certain Fundamental Rights to the citizens of India and enunciated certain Directive Principles of State Policy, in particular, that the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life, and shall direct its policy towards securing, among other things, -

- (a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;
- (b) the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good; and
- (c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment.<sup>1</sup>

The resolution went on to outline the proposed functions of the Planning Commission "having regard to these rights and in furtherance of these principles as well as the desired objective of the Government to promote a rapid rise in the standard of living of the people by efficient exploitation of the resources of the country, increasing production, and offering opportunities to all for employment in the service of the community."<sup>2</sup>

1 The First Five Year Plan: A Draft Outline (New Delhi: Government of India, 1951), p. 1.

2 The First Five Year Plan: A Draft Outline, p. 1.



There is one very striking feature of this pious resolution. The motivation for economic planning was directly linked with question of "rights" of citizens. In contrast, in the traditional formulations of welfare economics, the concept of rights is not invoked at all. In this resolution the formulation of planning objectives was, thus, placed outside the confines of traditional normative economics. While realisation of these objectives has lagged far behind what was suggested, and the focus on rights has not been tantalisingly matched by action, the firm use of the notion of rights in defining the role of planning is of some considerable importance in terms of the theory of planning.

It is this perspective of rights in the context of planning objectives that I want to examine in this paper.

## 2. Three Approaches to Rights

The two main approaches to the normative concept rights are the following.

(1) Welfarist consequentialism: All choice variables (e.g., actions) are judged exclusively by their effects on states of affairs (this is called "consequentialism"), and states of affairs are judged entirely by the personal utilities in the respective states (this is called "welfarism"). Rights do not come into this foundation at all, and insofar as rights have a role, they are treated as "instruments" to achieve other (right-independent) goals involving just utility. An example of welfarist consequentialism is the utilitarian approach, which has been extensively used in economics (for example, by



Edgeworth, Marshall, Pigou and others).<sup>3</sup> Not merely does utilitarianism judge states of affairs by utility information only, it proceeds to add up all the utilities to get a sum-total which is the only form in which the utility information enters the judgment of states, and through it - via consequentialism - the judgment of all choice variables, including rights as well as actions. Rights, in this approach, have no intrinsic value, but they can be useful means to utilitarian ends.

(2) Constraint-based deontology: In contrast with the approach of welfarist consequentialism, the deontological approach based on constraints regards rights as intrinsically valuable. But this value is seen not in terms of the evaluation of states of affairs, but in terms of direct constraints on actions prohibiting people from interfering with each other's rights. Within one's rights, one is free to do what one would like, and the role of the rights is to impose a series of constraints on what one may not do to others. As Nozick puts it in his famous book: "Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights)."<sup>4</sup> Libertarianism with property rights is the classic example of this type of approach, though the list of rights to be covered need not always be taken to be that given by the property-right framework.

3 A.C. Pigou's Economics of Welfare (London-Macmillan, 1920) provides a classic statement of the utilitarian approach to economics.

4 R. Nozick, Anarchy, State and Utopia (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), p. ix.



Neither of these two traditional approaches is very useful in understanding the possible role of rights in economic planning. The deontological approach is essentially negative, and even if it is freed from concentration on property rights, it does not provide any method of handling the positive requirements of action that rights-based planning objectives would require. To choose just one example, "the right to an adequate means of livelihood" referred to in the Constitution and quoted in the Resolution setting up the Planning Commission cannot in any way be accommodated within the deontological constraint-based framework. People - and the State - could be asked to refrain from preventing individuals from acquiring means of livelihood, but there will be no duty - even of the State - to help them to do this acquiring.

The approach of welfarist consequentialism can, of course, take a more positive view. On the other hand, it does not permit attaching intrinsic importance to the fulfilment of any rights. All that matters is utility, and there are no rights that are "fundamental" at all. In fact, this approach is directly in conflict with the placing of rights among the ultimate objectives, and thus with a statement like the one I quoted at the beginning of this essay.

So neither of the two traditional approaches are helpful in this exercise of having planning objectives in the form of positive rights. One has to look, then, for less traditional - and consequently less discussed - approaches. There is, of course, a considerable literature on "positive freedoms". While there is something of promise in that approach, it is also characterised by a great deal of ambiguity and some



possible contradictions.<sup>5</sup> Positive freedoms may be valuable, but (i) how should they be formulated?, and (ii) how precisely should they be used?

It is, of course, fair to say that such problems are far from resolved in the statement to be found in the Constitution itself, or in the declaration made by the Resolution setting up the Planning Commission. There is, of course, little reason to think that freedom from contradiction is a necessary condition for a statement to be important or useful (consider the unequivocal demand for "liberty, equality and fraternity!", which did move mountains) and perhaps it is a mistake to look for a very reasoned basis for a public declaration. On the other hand, if a rights-based approach is to be seriously used in planning decisions and in judging progress, there is need for clarity and consistency.

The natural approach to adopt in this context is what may be called a "goal-rights system".<sup>6</sup>

(3) Goal-Rights Systems: In this approach rights enter the goals, and thus directly come into the evaluation of states of affairs in terms of fulfilment of goals. Choice variables (e.g., actions, rules) are then judged in the light of their consequences. Essentially, this takes the form of including

5 See Isaiah Berlin, Four Essays on Liberty (Oxford: O.U.P., 1969).

This is extensively explored in my

6 / "Rights and Agency," Philosophy and Public Affairs, 11 (Winter 1982). See also my "Equality of What?" in S. McMurrin, ed., Tanner Lectures on Human Values (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1980), and "A Positive Concept of Negative Freedom," in Ethics: Foundations, Problems and Applications, Proceedings of the 5th International Wittgenstein Symposium (Vienna: Holden-Pichler-Tempsky, 1981).



fulfilment and non-fulfilment of rights into the "evaluation function" itself in terms of which the states are judged, and then using the evaluation of states as the basis for judging all choice variables - such as actions, plans, programmes, rules (including rights seen as "instruments").<sup>7</sup>

What is the advantage of a goal-rights system? That must depend on what the class of goal-rights systems is contrasted with. In contrast with ad hoc use of rights-based arguments, a goal-rights system provides a systematic basis for policy decision and debate. In contrast with constraint-based deontological systems, its approach is positive rather than negative, and this fits well with the exercise of planning. In contrast with welfarist consequentialism, a goal-rights system avoids the limiting feature of an exclusive concentration on utility information only.<sup>8</sup> This contrast is perhaps the most important one for economists in particular to look into, since welfarist consequentialism in the specific form of utilitarianism has typically ruled the economists' roost. This question - that of going beyond utility information - is taken up in the next section.

<sup>7</sup> A particular right (e.g., freedom from malnutrition) may then have a "dual" role, being both desirable in itself and being conducive to the fulfilment of other desired objectives (e.g., better nutrition leading to higher productivity and greater economic prosperity, making it easier to guarantee "an adequate means of livelihood for all"). For an important example of instrumental role of rights, see Partha Dasgupta, "Utilitarianism, Information and Rights," in A. Sen and B. Williams, eds., Utilitarianism and Beyond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Limitations of the informational format of utilitarianism (and - more generally - "welfarism") are discussed in my "Personal Utilities and Public Judgment: Or What's Wrong with Welfare Economics?," Economic Journal, vol. 89 (1979).



### 3. Utility and Progress

The Benthamite focus on utility must have been, in its time, a great liberating force from blind prejudice and uncritical judgment. Bentham wanted public policies and institutions to be rationally justified, and this was a breath of fresh air in the policy debates of his day. Utility provided the basis of his rational calculus, and it was not - of course - altogether pointless to choose people's satisfaction that as the basis of /rational calculus. Since the concept of rights - given its legal associations - can be used to justify inequalities and inefficiencies (e.g., by focussing on property rights), rights-based arguments were among the reasonings that Bentham and other utilitarians had to debunk to justify their more radical approach. Bentham ridiculed moral rights as "nonsense on stilts", and dismissed the doctrine of natural rights as no more than "bawling upon paper". From the perspective of to-day, there is much in that argument that is bound to arouse our sympathy - even admiration.

However, the rationality that Bentham pursued had the limited perspective of concentrating exclusively on a rather doubtful psychological magnitude, viz., satisfaction. Are satisfactions of different types equally valuable? If by social conditioning some deprived groups are made to take their deprivations as "natural" and possibly even "just", and if as a consequence, their dissatisfaction resulting from deprivation is made quite low, does that really reduce the social importance of eliminating that deprivation? Even if it does reduce it, does it reduce it in line with the magnitude of dissatisfaction, i.e., is utility the right "metric" of



social importance?

In more recent formulations, the identification of utility with satisfaction has been often replaced by its identification with the desires.<sup>9</sup> But desire is a psychological magnitude as well, and the problem referred to in the last paragraph fully survives this translation from satisfaction to desire. If a deprived group is made to accept its fate, by a social value system - religious and otherwise - so that the deprived does not desire - perhaps does not dare to desire - a radical change, does that make that deprivation unimportant? I believe it does not. There is a concrete element in social deprivation that no amount of psychological abstraction can eliminate.

What was really important in Bentham's approach was not the focus on utility to the exclusion of everything else, but the insistence on the need to justify policies and institutions in terms of well-defined goals rather than prejudice and dogma. In fact, when it comes to questions of deep deprivation which demand our attention directly - just and not/through the indirect effects on satisfaction or desires - it makes a great deal more sense to treat the freedom from such deprivation as a goal-right - important as a goal on its own and not as an instrument of some other (possibly utility-based) goal. What Bentham took to be "bawling upon paper" does have

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, R.M. Hare, "Ethical Theory and Utilitarianism," in H.D. Lewis, ed., Contemporary British Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976); J. Harsanyi, "Morality and the Theory of Rational Behaviour," Social Research, vol. 44 (1977); K. Ng, Welfare Economics (London: Macmillan, 1979); J.A. Mirrlees, "The Economic Uses of Utilitarianism," in A. Sen and B. Williams, eds., Utilitarianism and Beyond.



its value in rational discussions on policy and action.

The most blatant forms of inequalities and exploitations have typically survived by making allies out of the deprived and the exploited. You learn to bear the burden so well that you do not even notice that you are bearing any burden. The calculus of utilities has this built-in bias in favour of things as they are, since people learn to adjust to the existing inequities by the sheer necessities of survival, and that typically has the effect of making the inequity go down in the metric of disutilities.

To illustrate with a simple example, in 1944 - the year after the Great Bengal Famine - a survey was carried out, by the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, about health conditions in Singur - near Calcutta.<sup>10</sup> Among the categories of people surveyed were many "widows" and "widowers". As many as 48.5 per cent of widowers reported that they were "ill" or in "indifferent" health. The proportion of widows, on the other hand, in that category was just 2.5 per cent! and looking at Leaving out the blatantly ill, / the category of being in reported "indifferent" health, the proportions of widowers and widows respectively were: 45.6% and 0%!<sup>11</sup> This might, of course, reflect just a reporting bias as opposed to a bias in perception. But I believe the problem is much deeper than that, and the unrebellious acceptance of deprivation and "bad fate" distorts the mental reactions (including satisfaction and that of

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10 R.B. Lal and S.C. Seal, General Rural Health Survey, Singur Health Centre, 1944 (Calcutta: All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, 1949).

11 Lal and Seal, p. 152.



desire-fulfilment) of the typically deprived group. The utilitarian calculus just gives sanctity to that distortion.

Peculiarly enough, what has saved utilitarian calculus from producing ridiculous results is the "simplifying" assumption with which it is often combined. It is not uncommon to make the arbitrary assumption that everyone has the same utility function, and this does have the effect of drowning some of these distortions.<sup>12</sup> Utilitarianism is often saved by its failure - the distortions can get lost in the grossness of the empirical assumptions with which utilitarianism is combined (given the failure to apply it more rigourously).

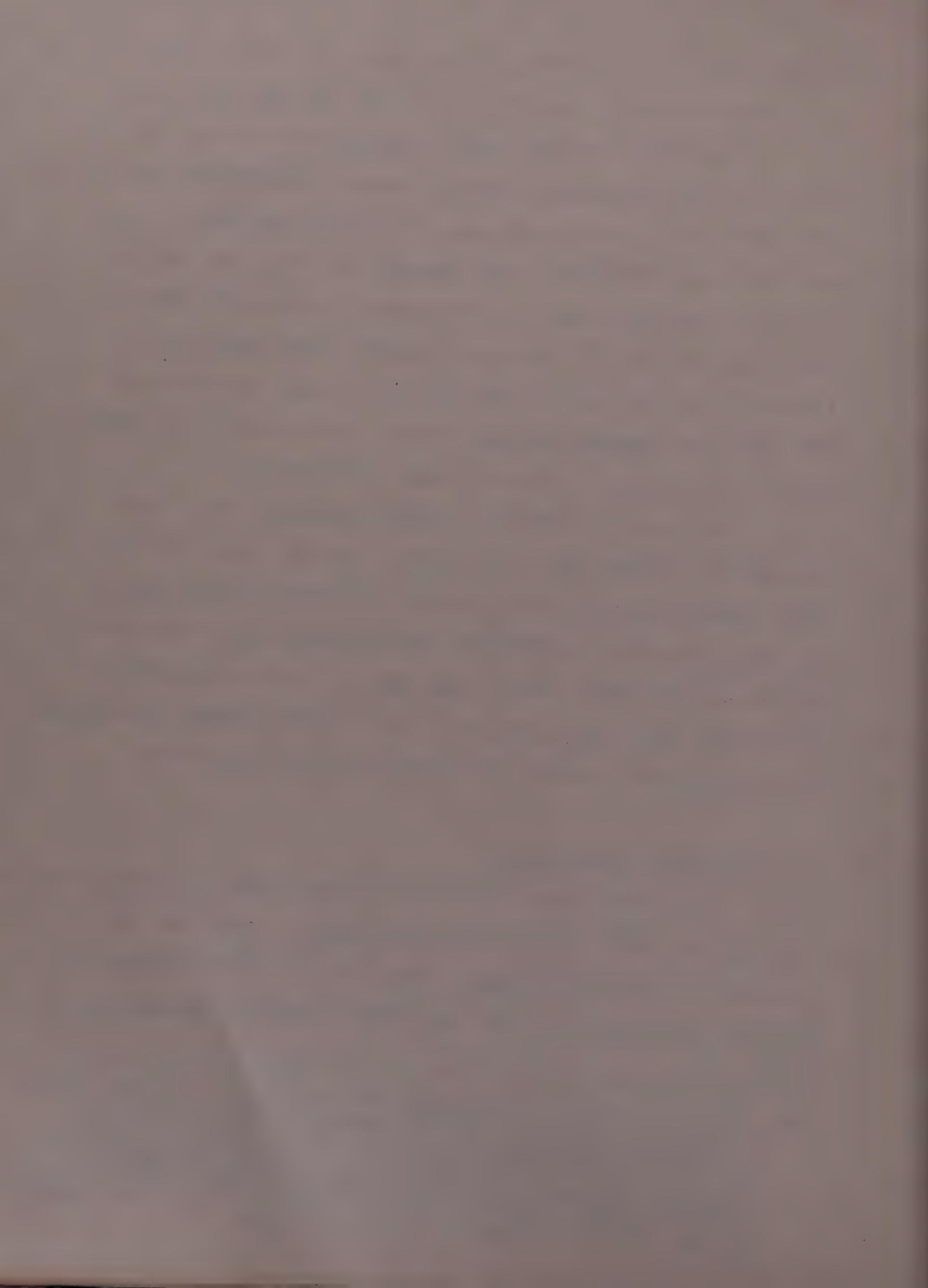
But when it comes to serious planning, this gross assumption will not do. The needs of people vary with age, sex, class, location, and a number of other factors, and no practical approach to planning can possibly ignore systematic differences between groups. We need a theory of planning objectives that would survive in the "light", rather than having to be justified as doing moderately well in "darkness"!

#### 4. Goals and Capabilities

In moving away from utility-based goals to less psychological objectives, there are various directions in which we can go. In some of these directions, roads wind up in one desert or another. For example, the impersonal commodity-based focus -

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12 In this respect, John Hicks's "base theory" of real income comparison (see his "The Measurement of Real Income," Oxford Economic Papers, vol. 10 (1958), and "Preference and Welfare," in Ashok Mitra, ed., Economic Theory and Planning: Essays in Honour of A.K. Das Gupta (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1974)) might, in fact, be superior to the more elaborate utility-based model.



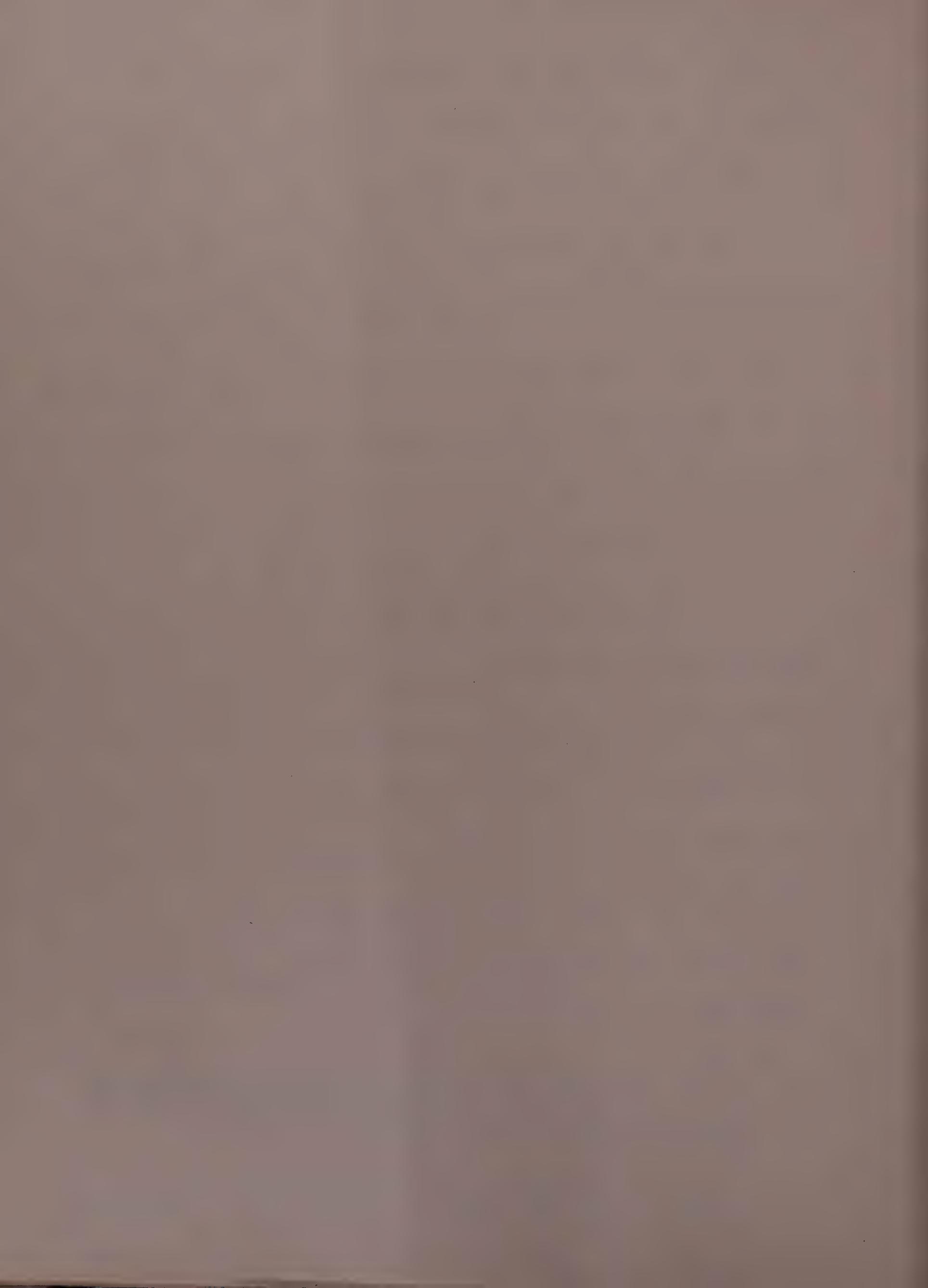
in terms of national income, wealth, etc. - ignoring the disposal of the over-all commodity vectors may be adequate for growth statistics, but it can scarcely serve as the basis of planning objectives.

One way of avoiding that aggregative grossness is to look not at the vector of commodities as such but at the vector of "named goods", with a typical item  $x_{ij}$  specifying the amount of commodity  $j$  going to person  $i$ . Such named goods analysis can be used for comparisons of social achievements, and various practical methods of using distribution-sensitive measures of economic progress have recently been explored.<sup>13</sup> The weighting system must take note of interpersonal contrasts in addition to the variations of inter-commodity differences.

To be sensibly used the method has to build on some specified structure and the one that appears to be most readily usable, and is also in line with economic rationale, is the assumption of convex social preferences. In using constant-price comparisons, some directional asymmetry has to be built into the measures.<sup>14</sup> When  $\underline{x}$  is the named-good vector (with a typical component  $x_{ij}$  specifying the amount of good  $j$  going to person  $i$ ) and  $p$  the locally appropriate weights reflecting relative social importance (with  $p_{ij}$  standing for the locally relevant weight on commodity  $j$  going to person  $i$  around  $\underline{x}$ ) the

<sup>13</sup> See my "Real National Income," Review of Economic Studies, vol. 43 (1976), and "The Welfare Basis of Real Income Comparisons: A Survey," Journal of Economic Literature, vol. 17 (1979).

<sup>14</sup> The analytical basis of the approach was first clarified by John Hicks, "Valuation of Social Income," Economica, vol. 7 (1940). While he did not go into the distributional question and dealt with aggregates, the same method applies to socially evaluating named goods, taking explicit note of distribution.



inequality  $\underline{p}x > \underline{p}y$  does indicate the superiority of  $x$  over  $y$ , whereas  $\underline{p}x < \underline{p}y$  does not indicate the opposite.<sup>15</sup> Using systematic valuations through local weights can be shown to yield results of considerable interest and value.<sup>16</sup>

This focus on named goods also proves to be useful for analysing starvation and famines, and in particular it draws attention to the goods that a person can command as opposed to the goods that just happen to be available in the market. Some of the major famines have taken place in years of good food availability, and the concentration on total food supply as opposed to the named good vector can be very misleading.<sup>17</sup>

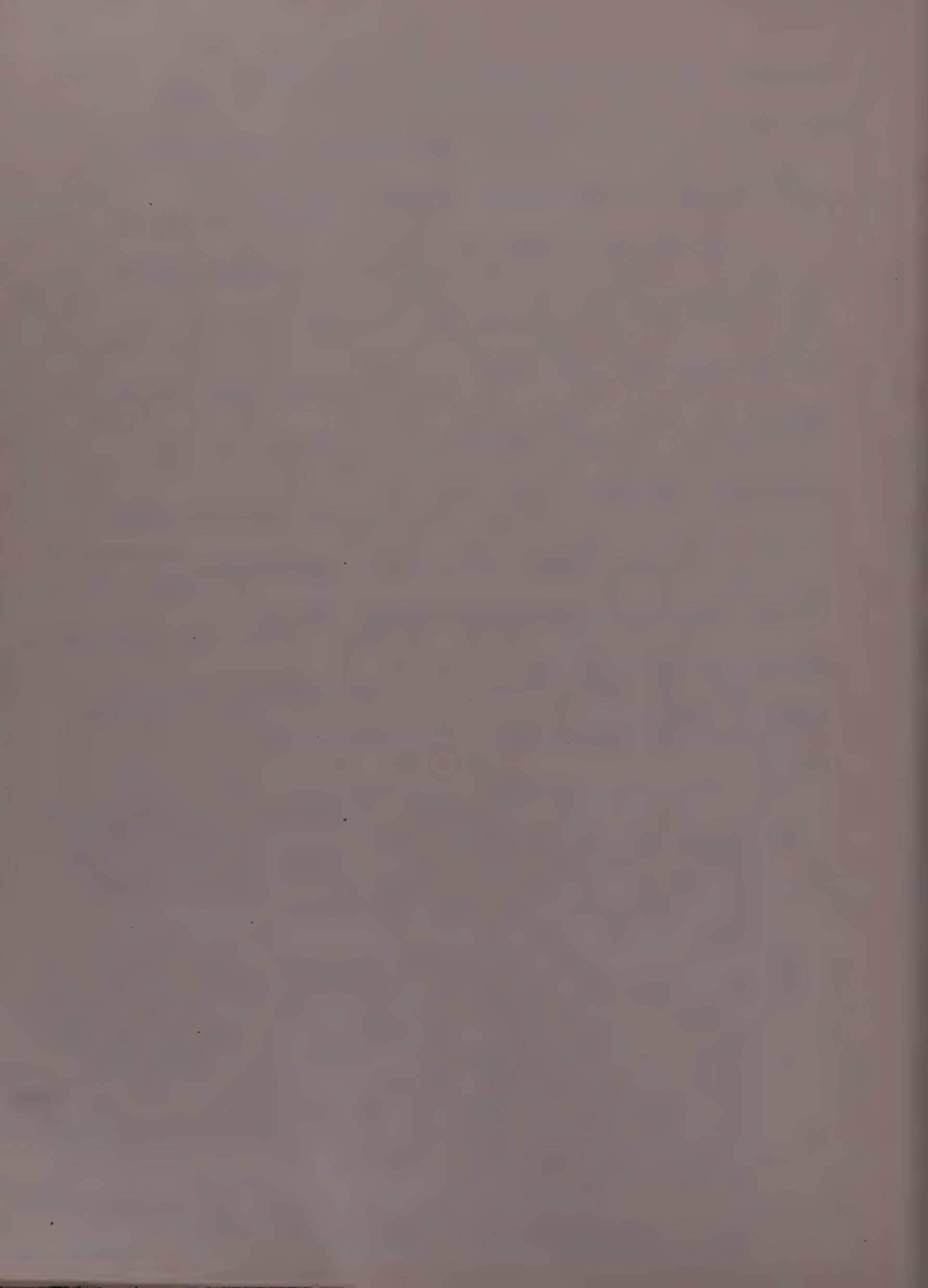
So far I have argued against focussing on personal utility and also against focussing on commodities irrespective of the command exercised over them by different people. It might look as if the right solution is, in fact, to concentrate on named goods which avoids both the pitfalls. There is some plausibility in this view. In the philosophical literature,

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15 The mathematical distinction lies between being below a "supporting hyperplane", in which case it must be below the "at least as good as" region, and above the supporting hyperplane, in which case it could be either in the "at least as good as" region or below it - we can't decide which on the basis of this observation.

16 See, for example, N. Bhattacharya and G.S. Chatterjee, "A Further Note on Between State Variations in Levels of Living in Rural India," mimeographed, Indian Statistical Institute, Tech, Report ERU/4/77, 1977; N. Kakwani, Income Inequality and Poverty (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); R. Radhakrishna and A. Sarma, "Inter-temporal Comparisons of Welfare in India," presented at the 4th World Econometric Congress, Aix-en-Provence, 1980; S. Sastry, "Regional Ranking by Welfare Indicators," mimeographed, Sardar Patel Institute of Economic and Social Research, Ahmedabad, 1980.

17 See my Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).



John Rawls has argued in favour of judging efficiency and equality in terms of the personal availability of "primary goods" - goods that everyone seek no matter what else they seek.<sup>18</sup> There is indeed much of value in that perspective.

However, what people get out of goods depend on a variety of factors, and judging personal advantage just by the size of personal ownership of goods and services can be very misleading. For example, the impact of food on nutrition varies between population groups, climatic conditions, age, sex, work load, etc. It seems reasonable to move away from a "fetishist" focus on goods as such to what goods do to human beings.

It might, of course, appear that if we were to take such a step we would return to the utilitarian - more generally welfarist - arena. But that is not so. Utility is only one aspect of what goods can do for human beings, and it concentrates entirely on the psychological side of the story. But there are also non-psychological effects of goods on people, and a comparison of - say - malnutrition of different people is neither a comparison of foods they had consumed (they could consume the same food and still have different levels of malnourishment), nor a comparison of utility (they could be equally malnourished but their levels of satisfaction or desire-fulfilment could still be quite different).

The following chart exemplifies the distinction between different categories involved in the relation between a good (say, a bike) and a person.

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18 J. Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971).



Good → characteristics → functioning → utility

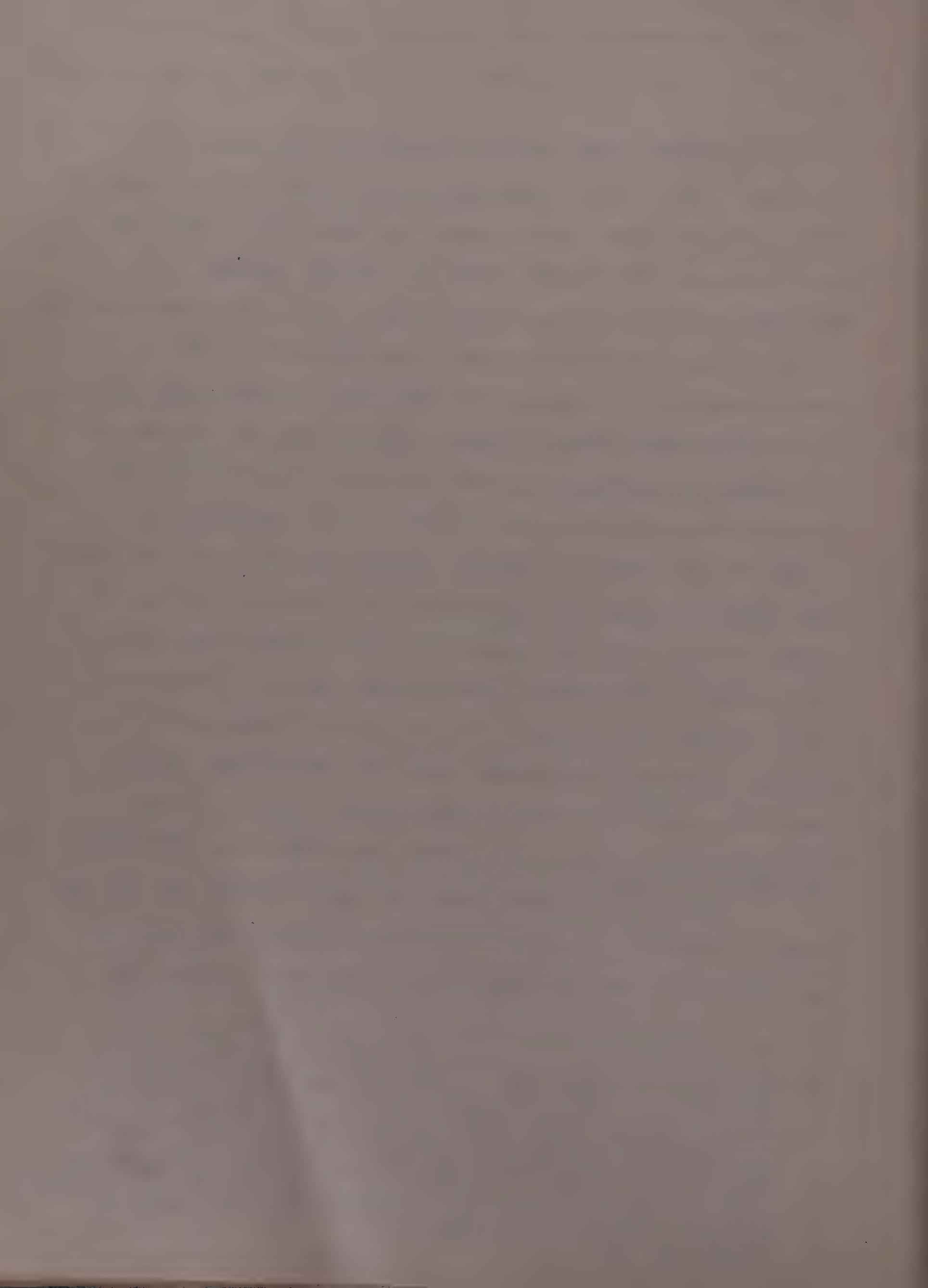
(e.g., a bike)      (e.g., transport)      (e.g., moving)      (e.g., pleasure)

Various wealth-based, growth-oriented criteria focus just on goods. This can be made distribution-sensitive as in the comparisons of named good vectors. It also can be made more purposive, as with Rawls's focus on "primary goods". The approach could be further refined by bringing in Gorman-Lancaster translation of commodities into characteristics, and it is of course possible to replace the comparison of named-good vectors by named-characteristic vectors. Indeed, that is how some of the named-good comparisons have been made - by implicit use of characteristics in place of goods (e.g., aggregating foodgrains in terms of calories rather than in weights reflecting relative prices<sup>19</sup>). Similarly, the focus on utility is common to all welfarist approaches, and of this class utilitarianism is of course a distinguished member. What seems to be missing is a focus on the category of "functioning" (e.g., moving, being well-nourished, being in good health, being socially respected), which seems however to be a natural candidate for adoption. It provides a basis that is neither commodity fetishist, nor just psychological.

When dealing with adults, it seems natural to look not merely at whether a person is functioning in a certain way, but whether he has the capability to function in that way -

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19 See my "Real National Income" and Bhattacharya and Chatterjee, "A Further Note on between State Variation of Level of Living in Rural India". The method was first used for aggregative comparison by Mabbub-ul-Haq, The Strategy of Economic Planning (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), and in the context of aggregate comparisons of Indian states by N. Rath, "Regional Variation in Level and Cost of Living in Rural India in 1961-62," Artha Vijnana, vol. 5 (1973).



even if he does not choose to. This is of course the typical concern of "rights" - freedom of speech does not require that a person should be continuously speaking, but that he should be able to if he were to choose to speak. For many of the basic capabilities, e.g., the capability to be adequately nourished, the choice element may be unimportant since opportunities if present will be taken up. But in other cases the distinction is important.

I have argued in this paper for focussing on personal functioning, which is a relation between goods and people. This differs from focussing on goods as such (as in the Rawlsian approach) or on the person's psychological relations only (as under the utilitarian approach). Even after accepting this, there will remain, of course, various additional issues to consider. Different types of functioning, and correspondingly, different types of capabilities, have to be weighted. Problems of interpersonal conflicts also have to be faced. These problems naturally do remain. But the choice of focus variable is a prior requirement, and it is with that I have been concerned in this paper. The choice of m-tuples of personal capabilities as the focus variable does not of course in any way resolve the conflict between alternative methods of constructing aggregate indicators.

Finally, it can be shown that the focus on basic capabilities not only accommodates the perspective of rights, it is also helpful in understanding some earlier classic arguments, e.g., Marx's treatment of "needs" in a non-subjective framework, Engel's (not Engels's!) treatment of the share of



expenditure on food as an indicator of well-being.<sup>20</sup> But such issues I leave for a different occasion.

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20 On that and related methods of "equivalence scales", see A. Deaton and J. Muellbauer, Economics and Consumer Behaviour (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Chapter 8.



Professor Sen considers that his paper "Planning and the Judgment of Economic Policy" draws heavily on the insight obtained from the empirical analysis presented by him in an earlier paper "Family and Food : Sex-bias in Poverty". The latter paper is also being circulated to the participants as advised by the author.



FAMILY AND FOOD: SEX-BIAS IN POVERTY

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November 1981

(Prepared for Rural Poverty in South Asia,  
edited by P. Bardhan and T. N. Srinivasan)



## FAMILY AND FOOD: SEX-BIAS IN POVERTY\*

The food consumption of a person can be seen to depend, among other things, on (1) the power of the family to command food, and (2) the division of food within the family. In an earlier study of starvation and famines (Sen (1981a)),<sup>1</sup> I concentrated on (1), analysing it within what I call the "entitlement approach". This approach, applied at the family level, focusses on the set of alternative bundles of commodities any one of which the family in question can command within the legal system operating in the country, using the various economic, political and social opportunities that the family faces. Starvation is seen, in that context, as a failure of entitlement. In analysing the causation of famines, the entitlement approach provides, in my judgment, the right focus. However, when we move away from disastrous entitlement failures that condemn people to certain death, and look instead at less extreme but more common situations characterised by regular starvation and chronic malnutrition, the entitlement approach applied at the family level is possibly too gross, since the division of food within the family could be a crucial issue that governs the use of the family's total entitlements. With that question of division of food within the family, this paper is concerned.

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\* I am grateful for support from the Leverhulme Trust, which provided me with the invaluable research assistance of Ms. Jocelyn Kynch. I have also received help and advise from Professor N.S. Deodhar, Professor B.N. Ghosh, Dr. Ashok Mitra, Dr. G.C. Pine, and Dr. Sukumar Sinha.

1 Also Sen (1976, 1977, 1981b).



The regional concentration of this paper is on Bengal, more specifically on West Bengal in India, even though I shall have some things to say also about the other part of Bengal, viz., Bangladesh. But despite this relatively narrow regional focus, the main analysis has relevance, I shall argue, for understanding poverty and malnutrition in the Third World in general. It also has implications for economic theory related to welfare economics, normative statistics, household economics, and planning.

## 1. Intra-family Disparities

There is a good deal of evidence from all over the world that food is often distributed very unequally within the family - with a distinct sex bias (against the female) and also an age bias (against the children). Such biases have been observed even in the richer countries,<sup>2</sup> but the picture of discrimination is, of course, much sharper and more widespread in the poorer Third World economies. Evidences of sex-bias and age-bias in the distribution of food within the family are indeed plentiful (see the survey of Hartog (1973) and Schofield (1975)), and come from different parts of the world, including Africa,<sup>3</sup> Asia,<sup>4</sup> and

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2 See, for example, Ritchie (1963) on the food consumption behaviour of Scottish mining families during the last world war and that of U.S. mining families during the depression of the thirties. See also Spring Rice (1939).

3 See, for example, Thomson (1954), Nicol (1959), Davey (1962a, 1962b), McFie (1967), Bohdal, Gibbs and Simmons (1968), University of Ibadan (1970), Crawford and Thorbecke (1980).

4 Postmus and Van Veen (1949), Mathur, Wahi, Shrivastava and Gahlaut (1961), Blankhart (1967), Government of Pakistan (1970), Institute of Nutrition and Food Science, Davva (1977), D'Souza and Chen (1980), and Chen, Huq and D'Souza (1980).



However, many of the more striking cases are of the anecdotal variety, so that it is difficult to decide how much weight to attach to them. Also, the information is very often "directional" (e.g., noting that women get less) rather than quantitative (e.g., how much less?). Given the nature of the comparison, hard, quantitative information is indeed difficult to get. Who eats how much in a family is a part of the private life of a family, and there is little possibility of an observer coming and measuring precisely what is happening, without affecting the phenomenon to be observed.

Nevertheless, there have been several careful studies, and two in particular related to Bangladesh deserve special attention. The Institute of Nutrition and Food Science of the University of Dacca did a sample survey during 1975-76 of 60 households each from 12 locations in rural Bangladesh.<sup>6</sup> Chen, Huq and D'Souza (1980) also did a study, in 1978, of intra-family food allocation in 135 families residing in four villages in Matlab Thana in Bangladesh.<sup>7</sup>

5 Flores, Garcia, Florez and Lara (1964), Foster (1966), Flores, Menchu, Lara and Guzman (1970).

6 From a total of about 5,000 "census circles" in the 1974 Bangladesh census, 160 were selected at random. These 160 circles, each containing 10-14 villages, were then arranged into four groups "according to the four major administrative divisions of the country" (Chittagong, Dacca, Rajshahi and Khulna). Then three census circles were selected in each of these divisions by a sampling method based on the total population of the census circles. Then from each of these census circles a single village was selected at random. A total of 12 "locations" were thus obtained, and sixty households were studied in each location.

7 The families were selected "purposefully" using the criteria of households (a) having one or more children under 5 years, (b) being accessible for practical organisation of dietary observation, and (c) grouped according to landownership ("landless", "marginal" and "surplus").



Table 1 presents the results of the Chen, Huq and D'Souza study. In every age group, the female members seem to consume less calories and less protein than the male members, with an overall shortfall of 17 per cent in each of these two nutrients. The disparity is particularly large for later age groups with the 45+ having 38 per cent calorie shortfall and a 35 per cent protein shortfall.

Table 2 presents the results of the survey by the Institute of Nutrition and Food Science of Dacca University. The age-classification is finer, even though there is no sex-classification for children (under 10). The sex-bias is seen in every age group for both calories and proteins, with the disparity reaching its peak for the oldest group, viz., 70+. The next highest contrast comes in the adolescent years of 16-19. It is not, of course, possible to compare the exact age patterns of disparity in the reported results of the two surveys, since the age classifications are quite different in the two studies.

These tables are, however, far from compelling in establishing that there exists any clear sex-bias in Bangladesh rural consumption of food. The difficulty rests not just in possible doubts about the representative nature of the two samples, but also in the fact that the so-called "requirements" of food may be different for males and females. Indeed, the Institute study postulates food requirements that has the effect of showing that typically men are more deprived compared with women in terms of the relation of food intake vis-a-vis "requirements". This is shown in Table 3. The female intake shortfall is, in every case other than that for children between 10 and 12 years of age, less than the "requirement"



Table 1

Calorie and Protein Intake by Age and Sex in  
Matlab, Bangladesh  
(June-August 1978)

Age	Calories			Protein (gms.)		
	Male	Female	Female shortfall (-) (percentage)	Male	Female	Female shortfall (-) (percentage)
0-4	809	694	-14	23.0	20.2	-12
5-14	1,590	1,430	-10	50.9	41.6	-18
15-44	2,700	2,099	-22	73.6	58.8	-20
45+	2,630	1,634	-38	71.8	46.9	-35
Total	1,927	1,599	-17	55.0	45.5	-17

Source: Chen, Huq and D'Souza (1980).



Table 2

Calorie and Protein Intake by Age and Sex in  
Rural Bangladesh  
(1975-1976)

Age	Calories			Protein (gms.)		
	Male	Female	Female shortfall (-) (percentage)	Male	Female	Female shortfall (-) (percentage)
10-12	1,989	1,780	-11	56.6	52.7	- 7
13-15	2,239	1,919	-14	61.2	53.9	-12
16-19	3,049	2,110	-31	83.3	55.8	-33
20-39	2,962	2,437	-18	82.0	66.6	-19
40-49	2,866	2,272	-21	79.8	65.3	-18
50-59	2,702	2,193	-19	78.2	60.3	-23
60-69	2,564	2,088	-19	72.7	58.1	-20
0+	2,617	1,463	-44	72.4	40.9	-44

Source: Institute of Nutrition and Food Science, Dacca (1977).



Table 3

Calorie Intake vis-a-vis Alleged Requirement by Age and Sex in Rural Bangladesh  
(1975-76)

Age	Male		Female		Female intake shortfall (-) (percentage)			
	Intake	"Requirement" "deficit" (-) or "excess" (+)	Intake	"Requirement" "deficit" (-) or "excess" (+)				
10-12	1,989	2,600	-24	1,780	2,350	-24	-10	-11
13-15	2,239	2,753	-19	1,919	2,224	-14	-19	-14
16-19	3,049	3,040	0	2,110	2,066	+ 2	-32	-31
20-39	2,962	3,122	- 5	2,437	1,988	+23	-36	-18
40-49	2,866	2,831	+ 1	2,272	1,870	+21	-34	-21
50-59	2,702	2,554	+ 6	2,193	1,771	+24	-31	-19
60-69	2,569	2,270	+13	2,088	1,574	+33	-31	-19
70+	2,617	1,987	+32	1,463	1,378	+ 6	-31	-44

Source: Institute of Nutrition and Food Science, Dacca (1977).



gap.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, from these Institute figures it would look as if the females have no deficit compared with requirements after the age of 15, and even before 15, their deficits - substantial as they are - are equal to or less than that of males. In fact, throughout the age range between 20 and 69, the women seem to have intakes greatly in excess of their "requirements". Men do far less well, and the tables seem to be turned.

The nutritional requirement figures used in these Institute estimates have distinguished lineage, viz., the recommendations of the FAO/WHO Expert Committee (1973).<sup>9</sup> But distinction is a different virtue from accuracy, and there are by now a great many doubts about the whole basis of nutritional requirement calculations.<sup>10</sup> There seems to be a substantial amount of interpersonal variability, and even for a given person much variation over time. Also possibilities of "multiple equilibria" of energy intake and use - at various levels of consumption - seem to exist. Furthermore, there are good reasons to dispute the assumptions about the energy use of activities performed by women, which are not as "sedentary" as calorie calculations tend to assume.<sup>11</sup> Also the extra nutrition

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8 The nutritional "deficit" of the children is marked. The average calorie intakes of children of age groups 1-3, 4-6, and 7-9, are respectively 630 ("requirement" 1,360), 1,172 ("requirement" 1,830), and 1,497 ("requirement" 2,190). The disproportionately high mortality rates of children in Bangladesh has been analysed by McIntosh, Nasim and Satchell (1981).

9 See also WHO (1974).

10 See, for example, Sukhatme (1977, 1978), Scrimshaw (1977), Srinivasan (1977, 1979); also Davidson, Passmore, Brock and Truswell (1979).

11 Chen, Hug and D'Souza (1980) blame "faulty national statistics on women's work and lack of quantitative information on the energy demands of household and home-based work" (p. 10). See also Farouk and Ali (1977).



requirements of the pregnant women and lactating mothers require fuller acknowledgement.

Finally, there is a great danger of circular reasoning in linking calorie "requirements" to physical characteristics, since energy "requirements" are calculated by multiplying the body weight by "energy requirement per kg. body weight",<sup>12</sup> related to the activity level, while the person's body weight or her as well as his/activity level does depend crucially on the energy intake of the person.<sup>13</sup> Calorie deficiency can, up to a point, justify itself!

Chen, Hug and D'Souza (1980) carry out rather different corrections - though also based on body weight and activity level - and come to the general conclusion that "for all age groups, male female intake to requirement ratios are at near parity, although marked male predominance persists among the young children", though they also warn that "these adjustments are illustrative rather than precise" (p. 10). In fact, it is very doubtful that given the theoretical problems and practical obscurities, the comparison of intake-requirement ratios throw much light on the relative positions of men and women in the division of food within the family.

It may be more useful to look at the actual consequences of food disparity rather than trying to compare the intake disparity with the "requirement" disparity. This pushes us in the direction of anthropometric comparisons and also towards

<sup>12</sup> Institute of Nutrition and Food Science, Dacca (1977), p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> On the complex relationships between work and food, see Bliss and Stern (1977).



contrasting morbidity and mortality related to nutritional deficiency. There is indeed some evidence of greater incidence of malnutrition among female children than male children in rural Bangladesh,<sup>14</sup> some evidence also of excess female mortality among children, and a suggestion that "'excess' female mortality was consistently higher during the food shortage years 1974-75 vis-a-vis 1975-77."<sup>15</sup> There is much scope for further work in this area.

## 2. Floods and Malnutrition: Rural West Bengal 1978-79

There were damaging floods in West Bengal during August-October 1978, affecting 30,000 square kilometers, with a population of 15 million, of whom - it is estimated - that 3.5 million lost their livelihood because of crop destruction and reduction of employment.<sup>16</sup> There was quite an extensive and efficient flood relief programme carried out by the state government. In connection with that work, an extensive survey was carried out in 1979 of all the children registered in four child care centres - selected at random - in each "block", choosing five blocks out of thirty,<sup>17</sup> also by random method.

Malnutrition of the children was studied in terms of "weight for age", following the conventional standard adopted by the Indian Academy of Pediatrics, classifying the children into four groups, viz., "normal", and suffering respectively

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14 See Table 7.7 in Institute of Nutrition and Food Science, Dacca (1977).

15 Chen, Hug and D'Souza (1980), p. 9.

16 See UNICEF (1981).

17 The combined population of the thirty blocks is 4.2 million.



from Grades I, II and III malnutrition.<sup>18</sup> Using these data, Table 4 below has been constructed, partitioning the children into three groups: (1) Grade III (severe malnutrition), (2) Grades III and II (substantial to severe malnutrition), (3) Grades III, II and I (moderate, substantial or severe malnutrition), and (4) normal. The children are classified into these categories for each 12-month age group (i.e., 0-12, 13-24, etc.). Total number of observations in each age group is also recorded in Table 4.

The picture that emerges from this is one of uniformly larger incidence of malnutrition among female children compared with the male. There is only exception to it, viz., age-group 61-72 months, in the aggregate category of Grades III, II and I malnutrition, and the gap there is slight (67.6% for males vis-a-vis 66.7% for females). In every other comparison - 17 in all - the level of malnutrition of girls exceeds - often by far - that of boys of comparable age. Indeed, even for the age-group 61-72 months, the incidence of severe (Grade III) malnutrition is much greater for females (10.3% vis-a-vis 4.1% for males) and the same contrast holds for substantial to severe (Grades III and II) malnutrition (41.0% vis-a-vis 18.9% for males). The figures are also represented in diagrammatic form in Figures 1-6, for visual comparison.

It should be remarked that these comparisons do not suffer from some of the difficulties noted in the last section concerning food-intake studies. They deal with results of food-intake

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<sup>18</sup> These standards were determined in the Hyderabad meeting of the Nutrition Subcommittee of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics in 1972.



Table 4

EXTENT OF 1979 MALNUTRITION AMONG CHILDREN IN FIVE RURAL  
BLOCKS AFFECTED BY 1978 FLOODS IN WEST BENGAL  
 (Percentage of respective age-and-sex-group)

Grades of malnutrition:	Age in months												TOTAL	
	0-12		13-24		25-36		37-48		49-60		61-72			
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
Grade III	7.1	11.3	18.2	26.2	9.4	16.6	6.0	10.5	6.5	7.6	4.1	10.3	9.2	14.6
Grades III and II	21.4	27.8	42.2	56.5	35.7	48.2	29.6	47.4	30.8	37.2	18.9	41.0	31.8	44.6
Grades III, II and I	59.5	75.2	87.0	89.3	79.0	84.6	70.8	74.2	69.8	73.1	67.6	66.7	73.9	79.4
Normal	40.5	24.8	13.0	10.7	21.0	15.4	29.2	25.8	30.2	26.9	32.4	33.3	26.1	20.6
TOTAL (number)	126	133	192	168	224	247	216	190	169	145	74	39	1001	922

Source: Based on data presented in UNICEF (1980) sample Survey Report.



# GRADES OF MALNUTRITION

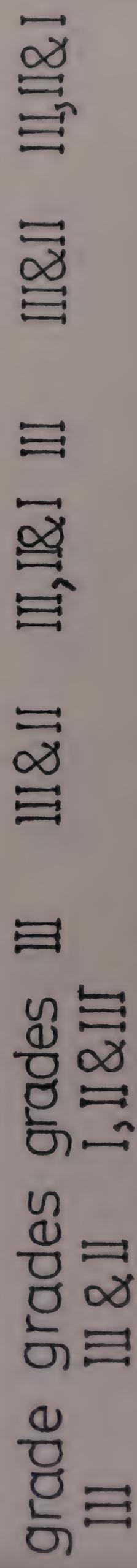


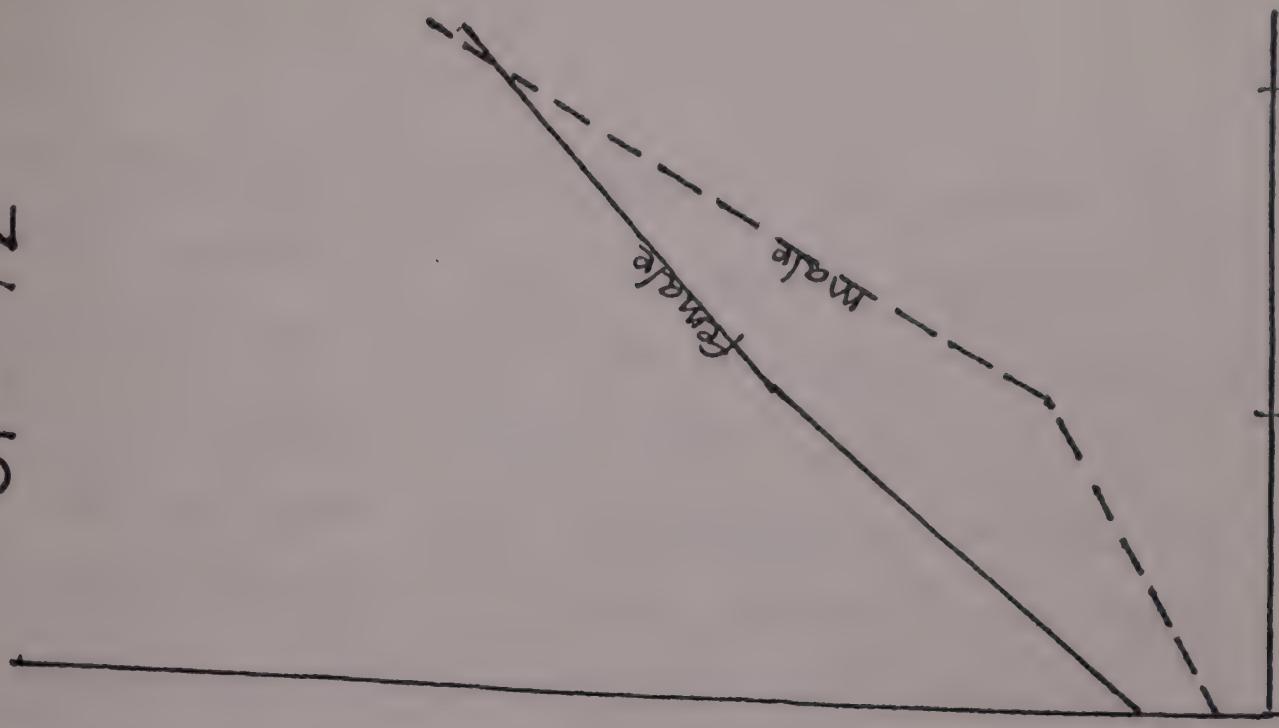
Figure 1  
0 - 12 months

Figure 2  
13 - 24

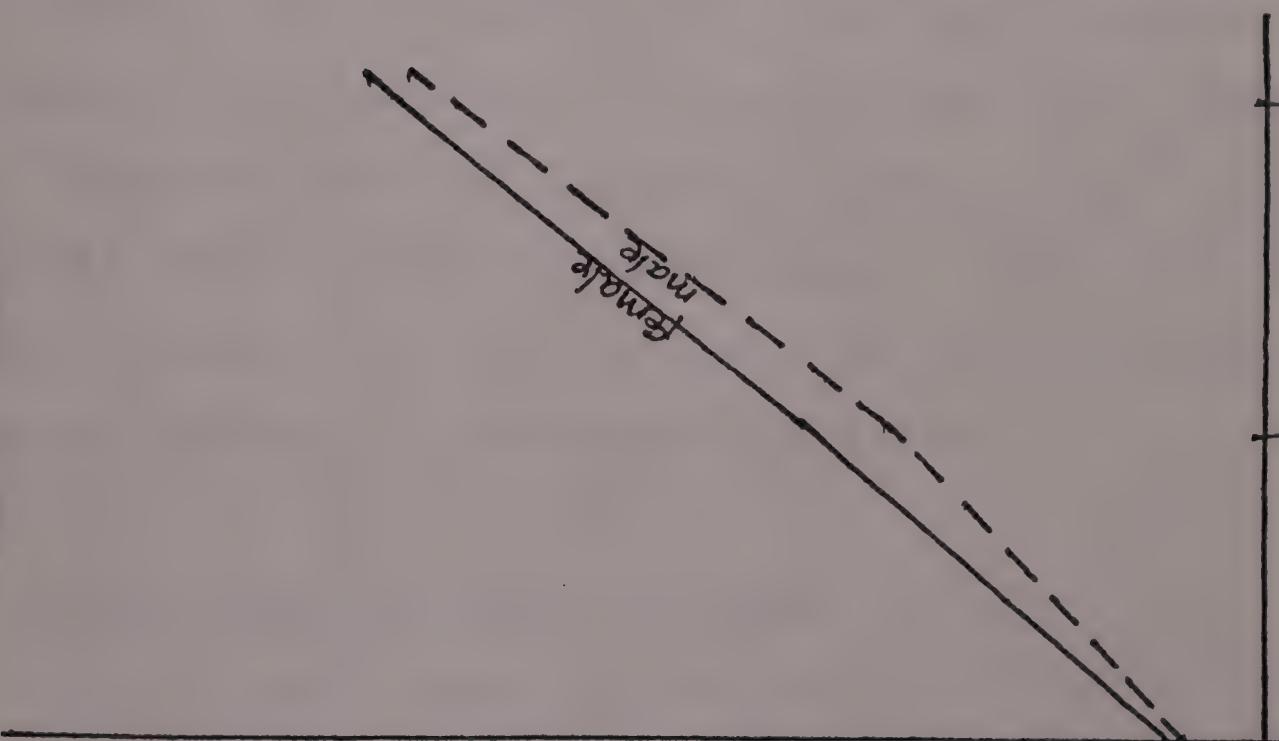
Figure 3  
25 - 36



III & II III, III & I III III & II III, III & I III III & II III, III & I III



III & II III, III & I III III & II III, III & I III III & II III, III & I III



III & II III, III & I III III & II III, III & I III III & II III, III & I III

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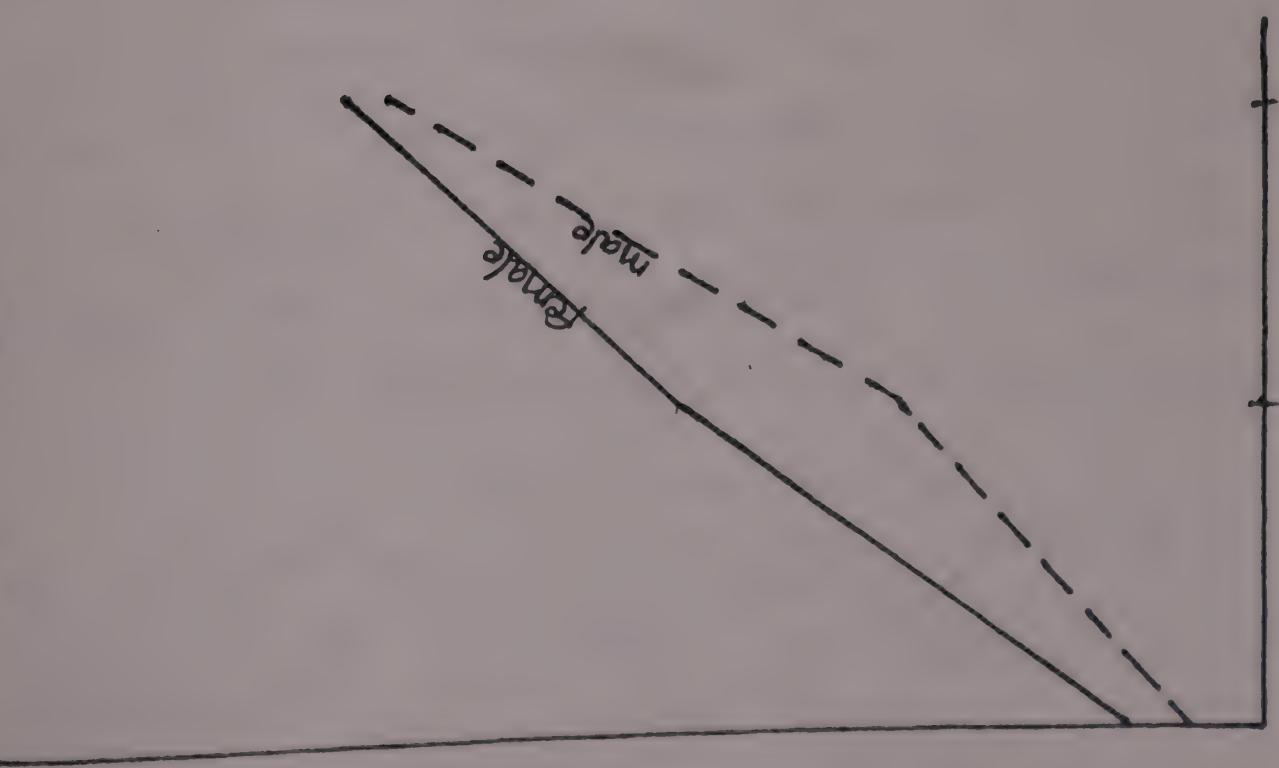


Figure 6

61 - 72

Figure 5

49 - 60

Figure 4

37 - 48



rather than with the quantities of food-intake itself, and the doubtful concept of "food requirement" does not have to be invoked. In section 4 the contrast between the two approaches will be taken up at a more general level.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the comparisons refer to a distress situation - one following severe flooding and coinciding with unusual economic deprivation. In fact, a relatively small survey of rural households from all parts of earlier West Bengal, carried out/in 1978, indicated a markedly greater incidence of malnutrition (in terms of weight for age) among boys vis-a-vis girls in the 1-5 years age-group.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in terms of normally superior performance of girls, the substantially greater incidence of malnutrition among girls in a situation of economic distress is particularly striking.

### 3. Differential Morbidity: Calcutta 1976-78

The Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority carried out surveys of health and socio-economic conditions in greater Calcutta during 1976-78. The findings can be used for comparison of male and female morbidity in Calcutta and its immediate vicinity. This is a large settlement, with 3.31 million people living in Calcutta proper, 1.28 million in the adjacent town of Howrah, 1.01 million people in the town of Hooghly, and 4.72 million in other adjacent towns and villages, forming a total

<sup>19</sup> See National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad (1979), Tables 24 and 25. The better performance of girls holds for every one of the ten Indian States that were covered, except for Madhya Pradesh, for one category ("severe") malnutrition. However, the samples are small, e.g., in West Bengal only 518 children were surveyed from the whole state (in contrast with 1,923 children from only thirty blocks in flood-affected districts in West Bengal in the 1979 UNICEF survey).



urban complex of 10.33 million people (in early 1978). Greater Calcutta has the reputation of being noticeably the poorest large city in the world.

The survey, which was conducted in collaboration with the Indian Statistical Institute and the Department of Health of the Government of West Bengal, was based on a stratified multi-stage sampling scheme. Altogether 4,728 households were surveyed out of an estimated total of 2.19 million households, representing 0.22 per cent coverage.

While malnutrition data were not directly covered, morbidity information was gathered and analysed. Table 5 presents comparative morbidity incidence of males and females in different parts of greater Calcutta, classified according to age groups. Three general categories were used, viz., "well", "indifferent" and "ill". Table 5 presents percentages of ill people in each category, as well as percentages of people who were either ill or in indifferent health.

These categorised data - based on interviewing - have some carefully done, obvious defects, but the survey was/ and it is interesting to see the picture that emerges from them for the poorest city of the world. The pattern is a mixed one, but there is a higher level of female morbidity compared with male morbidity in most regions except for the very young (14 and below).<sup>20</sup>

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20 It is worth noting here that there is very often a tendency towards under-reporting of female morbidity (see Kynch and Sen (1981)). For example, in the famous study of Singur - near Calcutta - in 1944, while 48.5 per cent of the widowers reported that they were ill or indifferent, only 2.5 per cent of the widows thus reported. The percentage of widows in "indifferent" health was reported to be exactly 0, in comparison with 45.6 per cent of the widowers being in that category! However, the recent CMDA was more persistent with questioning and more thorough in its follow-up investigation, so that the bias should be a good deal less here, particularly for Calcutta proper and Howrah.



Table 5

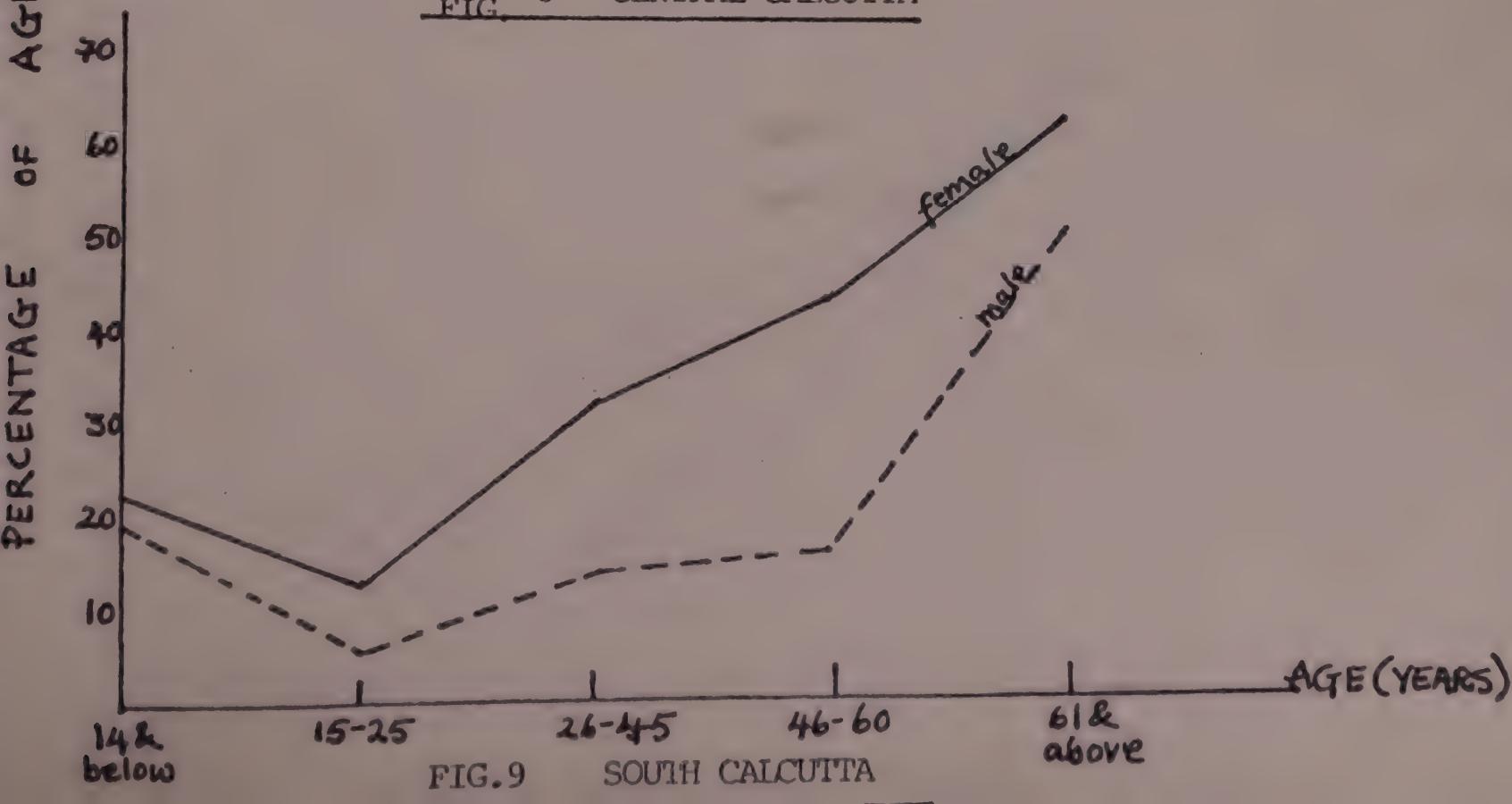
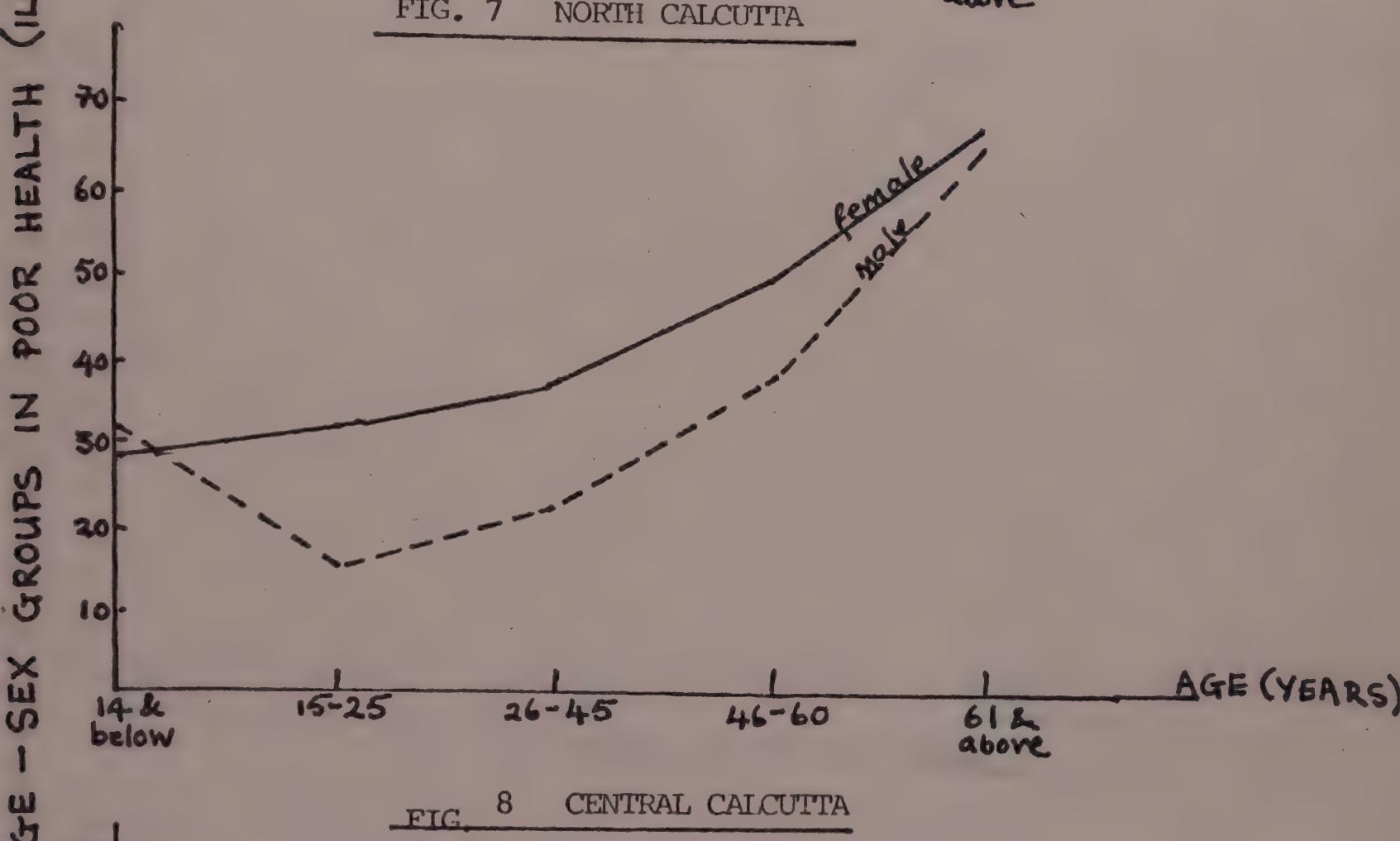
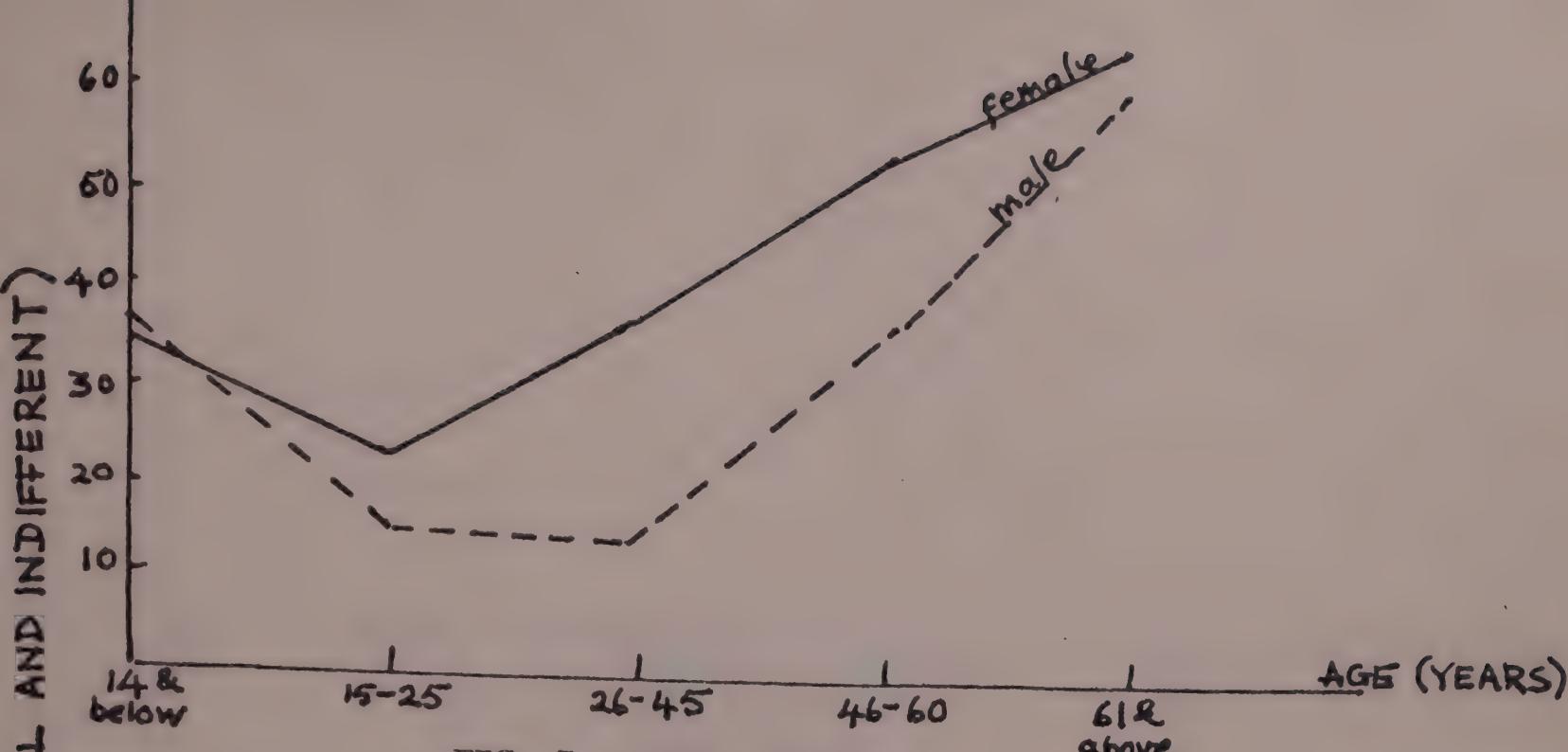
INCIDENCE OF POOR HEALTH CONDITIONS OF USUAL MALE AND FEMALE RESIDENTS OF THE CMDA AREA

Age in Years (last birthday)

		(percentage of each age-sex group)									
		14 & below male female		15-25 male female		26-45 male female		46-60 male female		61 & above male female	
(n) North	ill	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	8	9
	Calcutta ill & indifferent	37	35	16	25	15	38	38	56	63	68
(b) Central	ill	2	3	2	4	1	3	5	6	4	14
	Calcutta ill & indiff.	31	29	15	33	23	39	39	50	67	68
(c) South	ill	2	3	1	1	2	3	1	2	4	14
	Calcutta ill & indiff.	20	21	5	13	13	31	15	44	50	62
(d) Total	ill	1	3	2	2	1	2	3	4	4	7
	Calcutta ill & indiff.	30	30	13	25	18	37	32	47	58	67
Howrah											
(e) and	ill	3	2	2	1	1	2	3	4	4	8
municipal towns	ill & indiff.	35	34	23	33	23	47	47	57	78	73
Other											
(f) Towns &	ill	2	1	1	0	1	2	3	2	6	5
village	ill & indiff.	20	20	13	15	14	35	32	47	65	64
(g) Total	CMDA area	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	0	15	8
	ill & indiff.	29	28	18	26	19	40	39	49	64	70

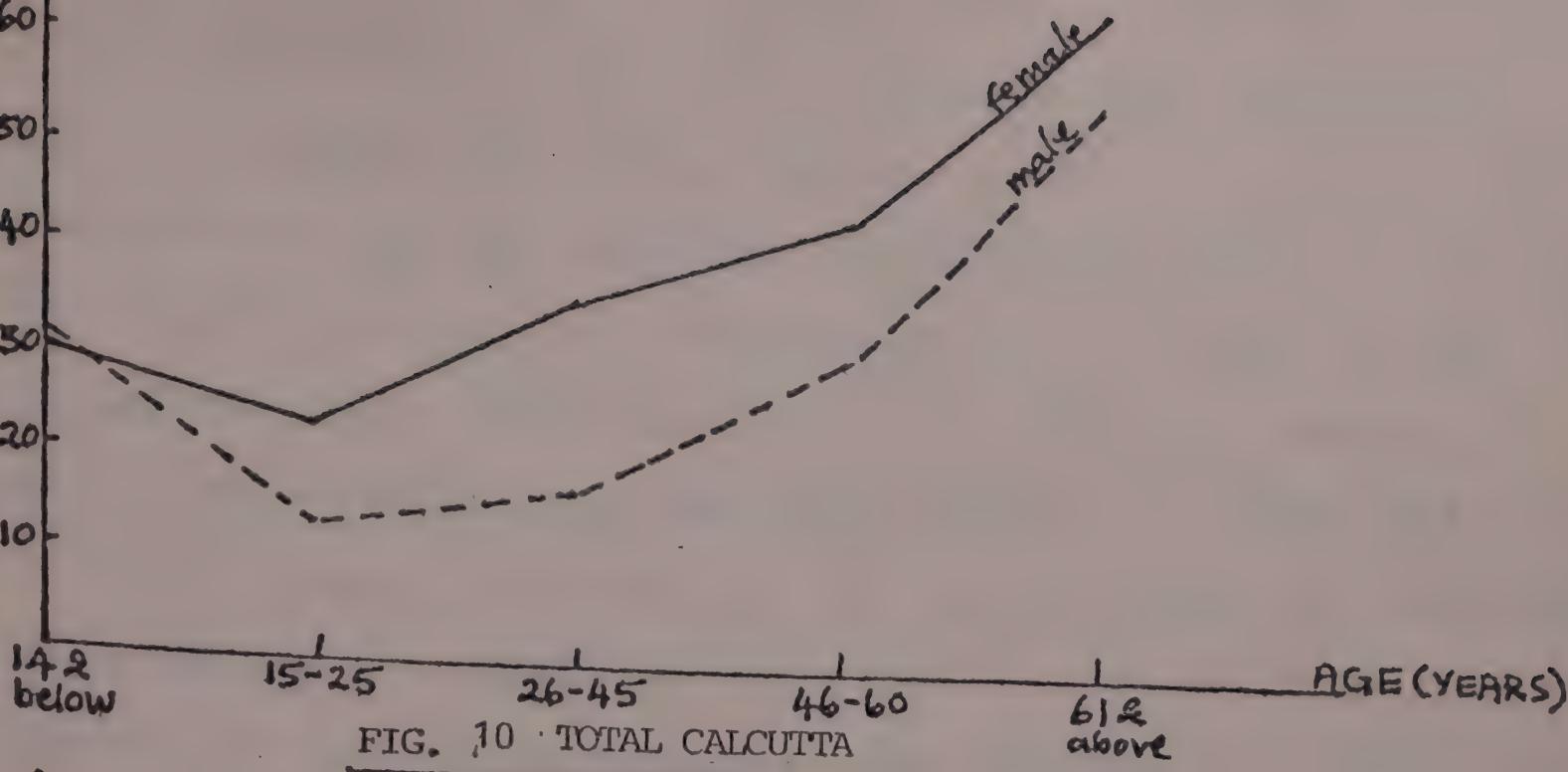
Source: CMDA (1980). The columns for "all ages" are based on Table 71 of the General report, while the other columns are derived from Table 202 of Part III of "Tables with Notes". The latter are reconstructed from an overall percentage breakdown, and to avoid spurious precision, are recorded only as percentage whole numbers.



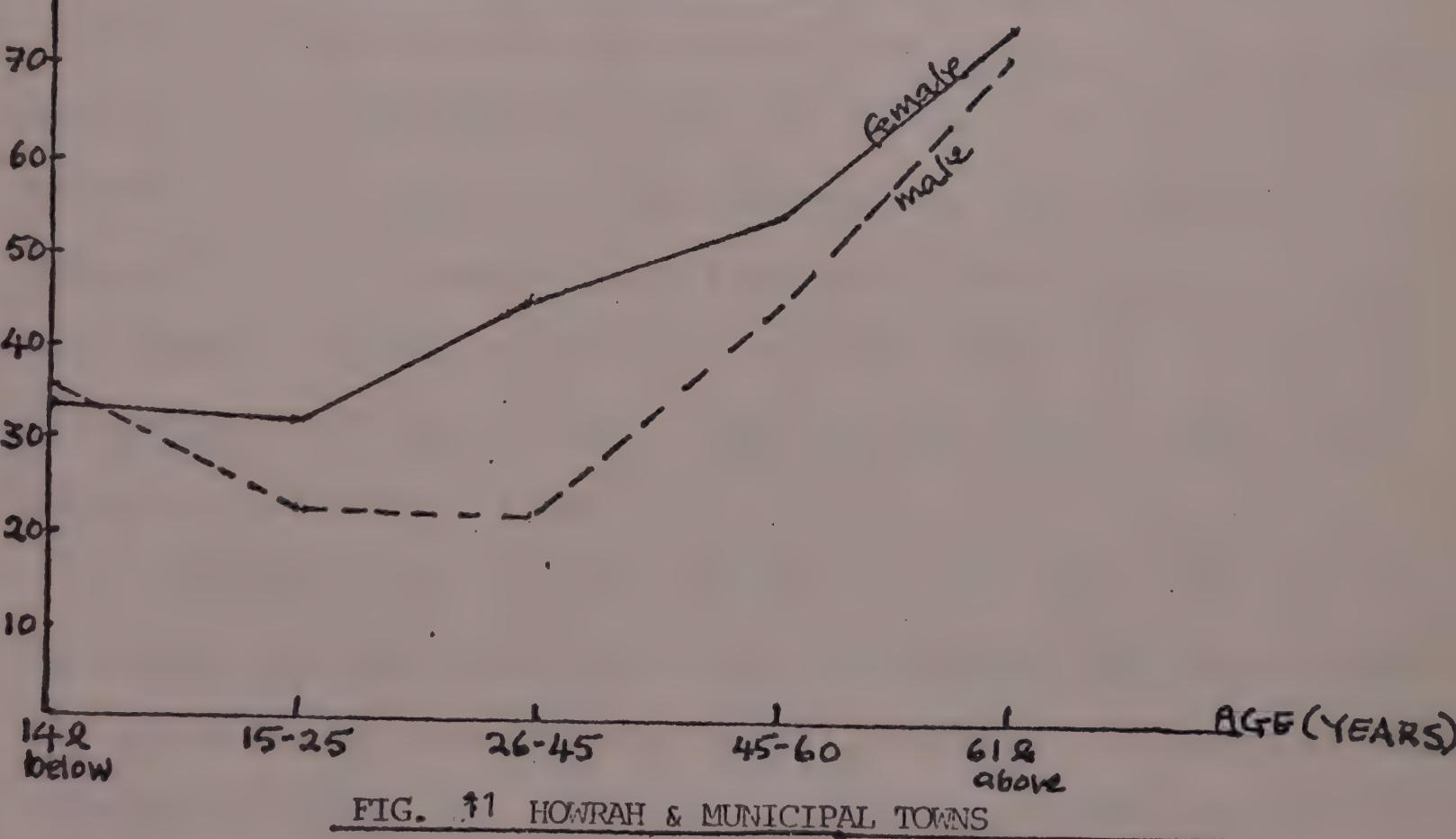




PERCENTAGE OF AGE - SEX GROUPS IN POOR HEALTH (ILL AND INDIFFERENT)



PERCENTAGE OF AGE - SEX GROUPS IN POOR HEALTH (ILL AND INDIFFERENT)



PERCENTAGE OF AGE - SEX GROUPS IN POOR HEALTH (ILL AND INDIFFERENT)

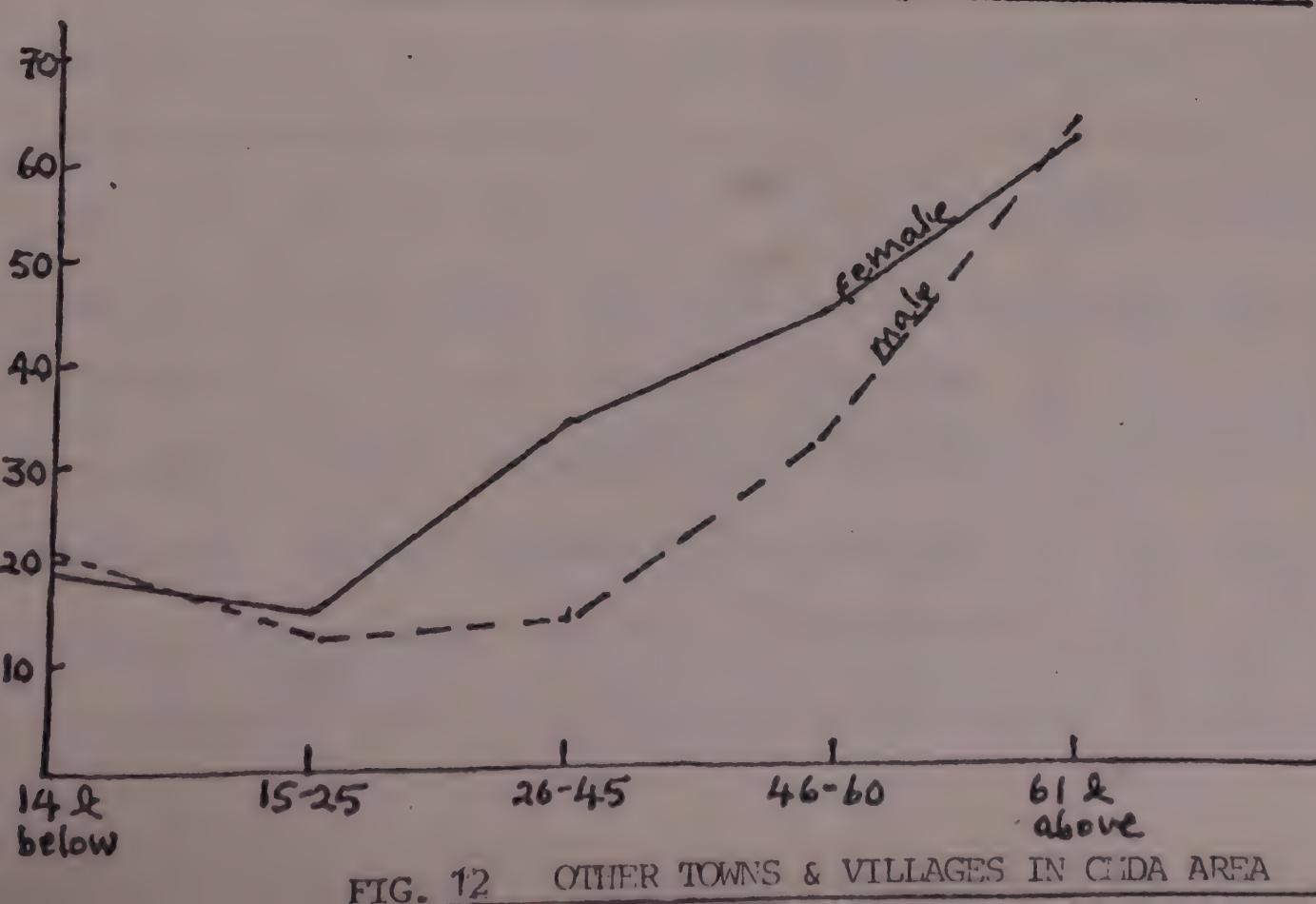


FIG. 12 OTHER TOWNS & VILLAGES IN C.I.D.A. AREA



There are also data for the slum-dwellers in Calcutta. Table 6 presents the figures for two types of "bustees" - the "unimproved" and the "improved" (with certain amenities provided). With very few exceptions, female morbidity in terms of both categories (viz., "ill" and "ill or indifferent") emerge as being appreciably higher than male morbidity in each age-group.

It is not, of course, by any means obvious that morbidity is primarily the result of malnutrition. But malnutrition is one of the factors in morbidity, and the pattern of deprivation in food may well go together with other types of deprivation. In any case, for what it is worth, the morbidity picture - possibly providing some indirect evidence of nutritional disparity - give some reason to expect discrimination against the female, though the pattern here is not at all as clear as the pattern of malnutrition among the children in the flood-affected regions of rural West Bengal (section 2 above).

Finally, the figures relating to the slums have the advantage of concentrating on an economically deprived group. The over-all figures for the normal residents of greater Calcutta, presented in Table 5, aggregate over a very wide range of income groups. This is a source of some possible bias, since sex distribution might well be related to the income level, particularly in view of the large number of migrant (often out-of-state) male labourers who work in Calcutta and have their families back in the village. The CMDA data do, however, cover monthly household expenditures per capita of the households surveyed. Table 7 presents the picture for the different expenditure groups. As is to be expected, the incidence of typically illness/goes down with rise in household per capita expenditure -



**Table 6**  
**INCIDENCE OF POOR HEALTH CONDITIONS OF USUAL MALE AND FEMALE**  
**RESIDENTS IN THE IMPROVED AND UNIMPROVED BUSTEES IN CMDA**

		Age in Years (last birthday)				(percentage of each age-sex group)							
		14 & below male female		15-25 male female		26-45 male female		46-60 male female		61 & above male female		All ages male female	
Health													
Improved	ill	3	5	-	-	1	3	-	3	-	18	1.4	4.0
	ill & indifferent	22	27	17	18	24	56	40	67	44	53	24.4	38.6
Unimproved	ill	1	1	2	1	-	4	6	3	-	-	1.1	1.6
	ill & indifferent	36	38	13	21	21	52	37	61	65	80	27.5	41.1

Source: The columns for "all ages" are based on Table LI of Seal, Bhattacharjee, Roy and Rao (1981). The other columns are derived from Table 202 of Part III of "Tables with Notes" of CMDA (1980), and being reconstructed from an overall percentage breakdown, are recorded only as percentage whole numbers, to avoid spurious precision. Dash (-) stands for zero or negligible.



# CONDITION OF HEALTH

ill & indifferent  
ill

PER CENT

40 35 30 25 20 15 10 5

(See Table 6)

FIGURES 13 and 14 INCIDENCE OF POOR HEALTH CONDITIONS IN BUSTIES

improved  
unimproved

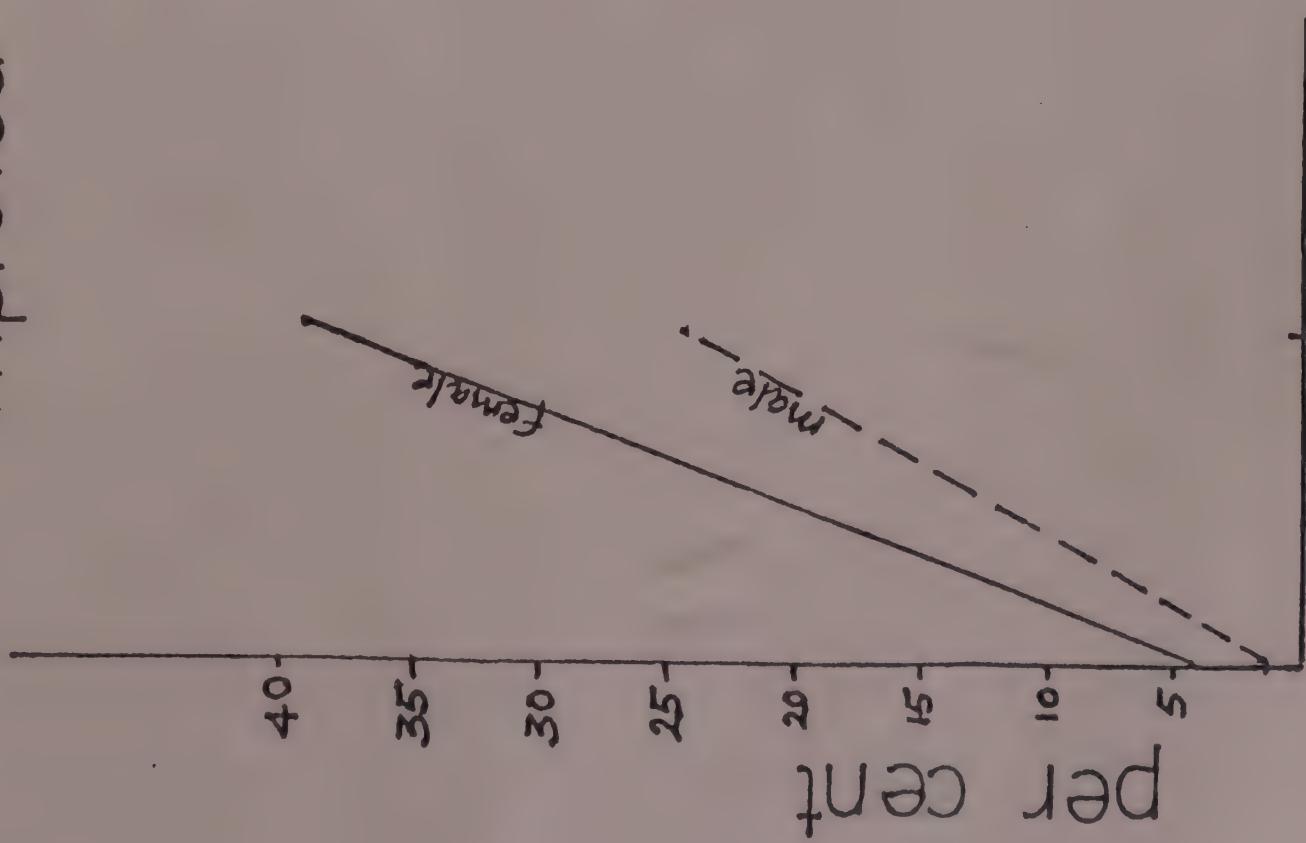
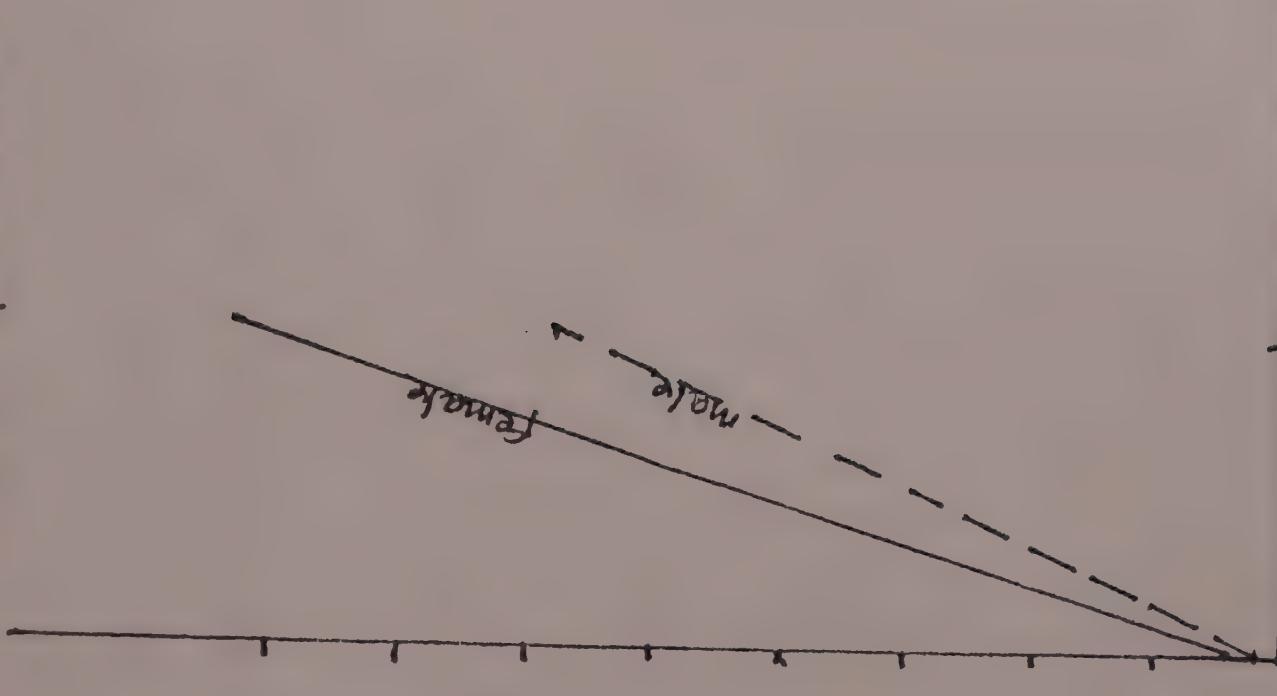




Table 7

INCIDENCE OF POOR HEALTH CONDITIONS OF USUAL MALE AND FEMALE RESIDENTS  
OF THE CMDA AREA BY PER CAPITA HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE GROUPS

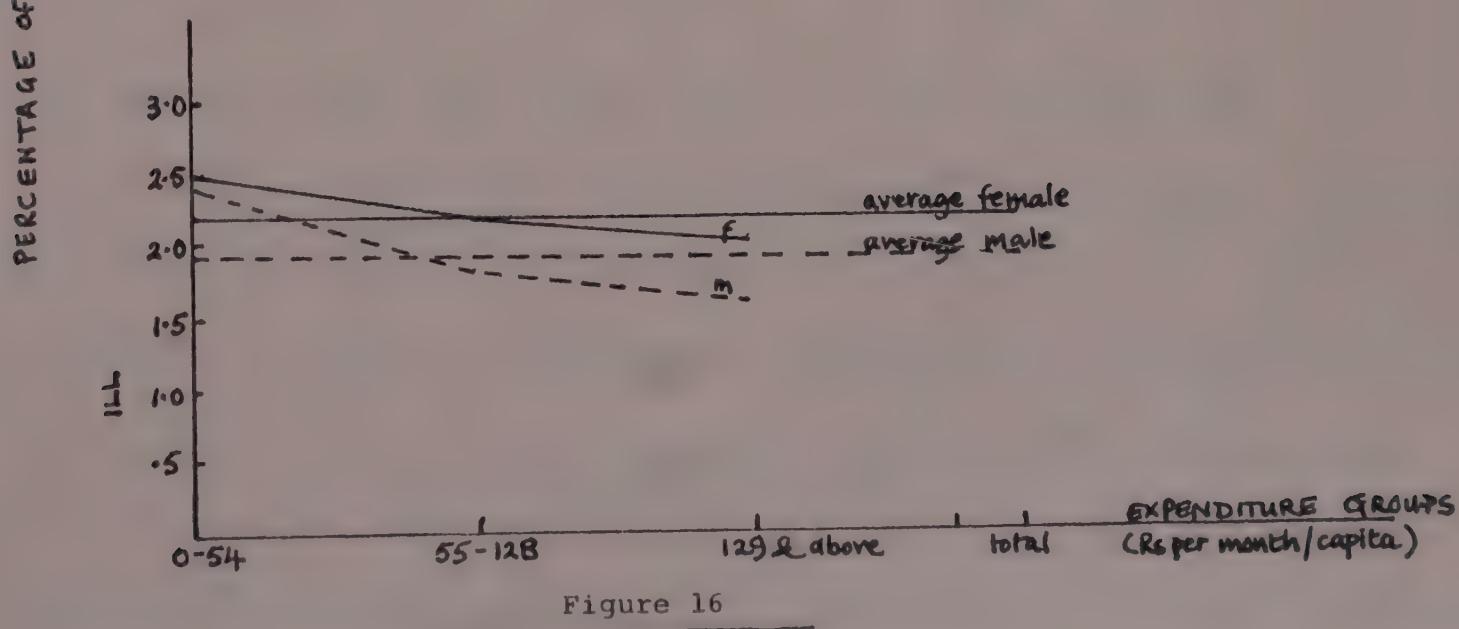
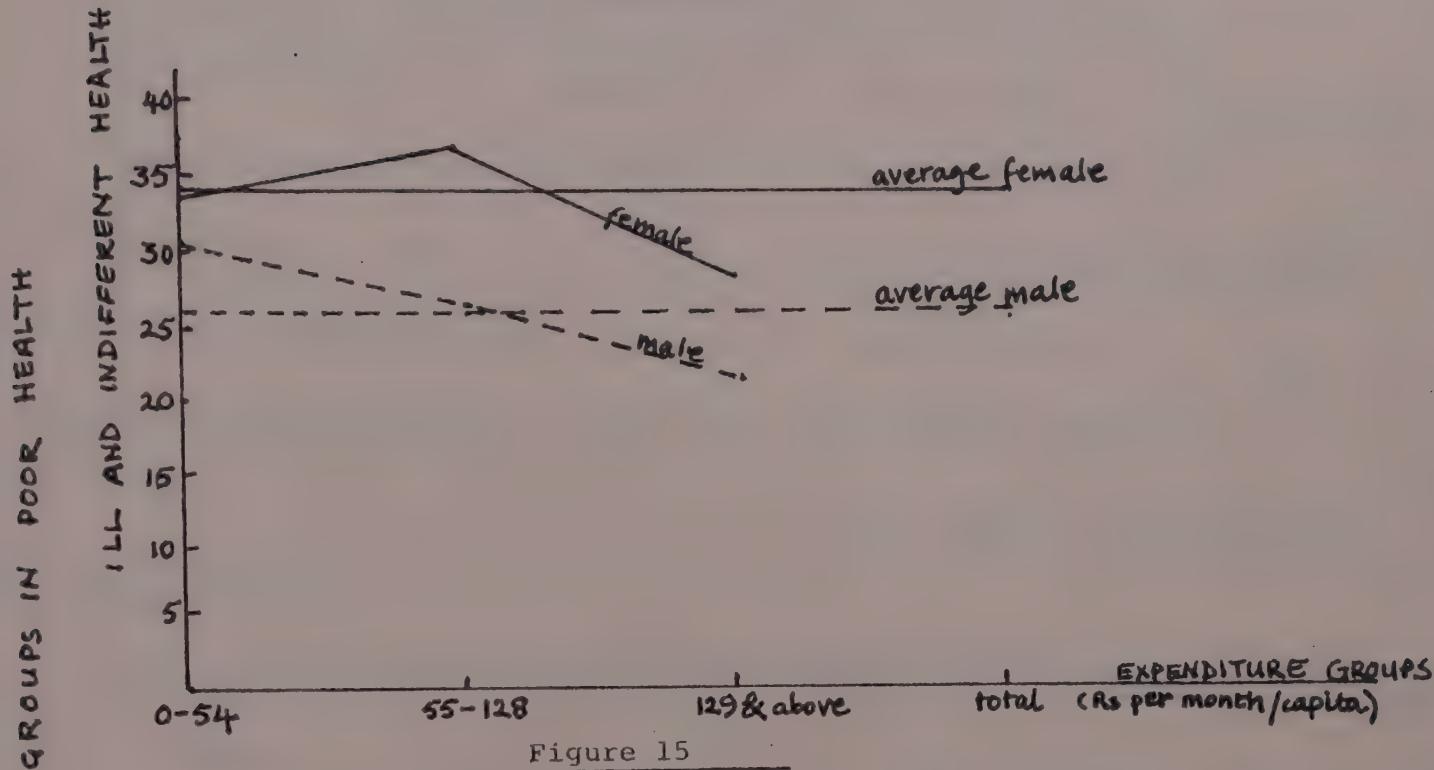
(percentage of each sex-expenditure group)

		Per Capita Monthly Expenditure Group (Rs. per month)						
		0-54		55-128		129 and above		Total
		male	female	male	female	male	female	male
III		2.4	2.5	1.8	2.2	1.6	2.0	1.9
III and indifferent		30.6	34.6	26.5	37.1	21.7	28.4	26.0
								34.7

Source: Table 73 of the general report of CMDA (1980).



FIGURES 15 and 16. INCIDENCE OF POOR HEALTH CONDITIONS IN CMDA ACCORDING TO EXPENDITURE GROUPS  
 (see Table 7)





a rough index of economic prosperity - but the females have consistently greater morbidity in each expenditure group.

#### 4. Implications for Economic Analysis and Policy

The existence of substantial intra-family disparities would have serious implication on economic analyses of many different types. The family is often the decision-making unit for work and consumption. If these decisions are based on systematic discrimination between different members of the family, it becomes difficult to relate these decisions to individual welfare.<sup>21</sup>

This particular problem is typically avoided in traditional economic theory by one of three possible devices. One is simply to abstract from the family, and carry on the analysis as if each individual takes decisions on his own, and this is the typical structure of, say, the theoretical literature on "general equilibrium". The model works neatly enough, but that is not the way the world is, in fact, organised.

The second approach is to ignore the individual altogether, and to take the family as the unit of analysis - of decisions, of actions, and even of welfare. In terms of economic behaviour, this may or may not be close to the reality, but even if it is, it raises the deep question as to whether the well-being of individuals can be ignored in making social welfare judgments or in comparing standards of living, and whether economic policy

21 This adds to the dichotomy between choice and welfare that exists even without considering the problem of intra-family distribution. On that general dichotomy, see Sen (1977b).



should be geared only to the conception of family well-being that the decision-takers in the family could be seen as pursuing. If that family-based conception permits disparities (e.g., putting lower weight on the malnourishment of the children or of women), should that be the basis of social assessment and public policy? I believe to ask this question is to answer it. It would be very odd indeed if the family-head's view of family welfare were all that mattered for public judgment and social policy.

The third approach is to assume complete harmony within the family, with the well-being of every member of the family being equally served by the family decisions. In this approach everyone shares the same level of well-being, and it does not matter whether we look at the average level (in the Benthamite way), or at the minimal level (in a Rawlsian way), since they give the same answer. This is an empirical assumption, and if true, it avoids many practical difficulties. The trouble is that as an empirical assumption, it is very difficult to justify. Indeed, the evidence on the sharp disparities within the family would seem to militate against the assumption.

While these are the traditional assumptions - though usually made implicitly - there is a fourth approach that is worth considering, and which has received some support recently. It can be argued that the notion of "individual welfare" itself is a non-viable concept in societies in which the family is dominant. There might be, it is argued, no way of specifying the welfare of the individual in contrast with that of the family.<sup>22</sup>



This fourth view has some similarity with the second, except that individual welfare is not so much ignored as taken to be a non-sustainable concept in this context.

It is important to distinguish between two different views that may be associated with this approach. First, it may be argued that individual welfare cannot be taken to be independent of the welfare of the rest of the family.<sup>23</sup> This is convincing enough, but it need not really make the concept of individual welfare non-sustainable, since it only rejects the independent conception of that welfare. Separateness of individual welfare has to be distinguished from the independence of individual welfare. Individual welfares may be interdependent but distinct.

Second, it might be argued that the introspective notion of individual welfare may be itself unsustainable, since that is not how members of the family do introspect. Certainly, for some members of the family - such as infants and children - the introspective notion is problematic or useless. But for others, it seems a bit difficult to claim that a member of the family would not be able to attach any meaning to the notion of his or her individual welfare as it appears to him or her. The issue is not whether the person poses this question to himself or herself as a regular introspective activity, but whether he or she is able to understand and answer such a question if it were posed. Indeed, the traditional acceptance of deep inequalities within the family - against women in

<sup>23</sup> Cf. "... in the important area of food, nutrition, and health, it would be a gross oversimplification to define an individual's welfare as his state of satisfaction from the goods and services that he receives from his environment" (Das and Nicholas (1981), p. 26).



particular - does indeed thrive on not asking some of these questions that appear to be "divisive", but that is not because such questions cannot - if posed - be understood or answered.

It is, of course, possible to argue that the introspective concept of individual welfare - while perfectly sustainable - is not an adequate basis for discussions on social welfare, standard of living and economic policy. Indeed, I have tried to argue in that direction elsewhere, showing the limitation of the traditional notion of "utility" as a basis of judgment and action.<sup>24</sup> In particular, there are good grounds for arguing that a person's capability failure may well be judged not on the metric of how upset he is about it, but by the extent of the capability failure itself. If a person is unable to get the nourishment he or she needs, or unable to lead a normal life due to some handicap, that failure - on this view - is itself important, and not made important only because he or she incurs dissatisfaction or disutility from that failure.

If the focus is on the deprivation of personal capabilities, then inequalities within the family have an importance of their own, no matter what view we take of the sustainability of the notion of individual welfare in cultures in which the family plays a dominant role. There is no escape from the grave tragedy of the disproportionate malnourishment of children (or sharper malnourishment of the female children in distress situations, as discussed in section 2), or the unusual morbidity of women (as discussed in section 3). The problem has to be

24 Sen (1977c, 1979, 1980).



distinguished from the deprivation of goods as such since the "capability approach" is concerned with what goods can do to human beings.<sup>25</sup> Thus, malnourishment and morbidity - not to mention mortality - provide a better focus than food intake itself (see section 1).

If disparities within the family are not ruled out of court with one assumption or another, the implications for economic analysis and policy are truly monumental. This is not the occasion to go into a full-fledged analysis of the different implications, but some may be briefly referred to as examples.

First, in terms of policy, the problem of malnutrition and hunger can no longer be seen only as a matter of entitlement of the family, depending on the family's earning power and market command, and requires analysis of the division of entitlements within the family.<sup>26</sup> The issue of social values - "divisive" including what/questions are or are not posed (as discussed earlier) - becomes a central one, in this context.

Second, the gap between decisions of family heads and the well-being - introspective or not - of individual members

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25 The "capability approach" (Sen (1980)) can be seen as an extension of Rawls's (1971) focus on "primary goods". Rawls motivates his concern with primary goods by showing their relevance to what people are able to do. While he postpones the question of interpersonal variation in the transformation of primary goods into capabilities, the capability approach takes explicit note of that. For nutrition and health such variations are, of course, inescapable.

26 This is not to deny the importance of entitlement of families in the causal analysis of starvation and undernourishment, both in famine and non-famine situations (see Sen (1981a, 1981b)). But the analysis has to be carried beyond that, especially in catching the specific pattern of deprivation.



of the family makes market data that much more difficult to interpret in terms of need satisfaction. The market demands would - at best - reflect the relative importance of different items as seen by the decision-takers ("revealed preference" cannot go beyond that, even if it can go so far as that<sup>27</sup>). This calls into question not merely the traditional optimality results related to the market mechanism - for market socialism<sup>28</sup> as well as for competitive capitalism<sup>29</sup> - it also has far-reaching implications for public policy and planning using market information.<sup>30</sup>

Third, the evaluation of standard of living is usually done on the basis of market data. While the problems arising from different sizes and compositions of families is often neglected, there have been a number of important contributions recently to correct for variations of size and composition through the use of "equivalence scales".<sup>31</sup> But these scales operate either (i) with the assumption of complete harmony within the

27 See Samuelson (1947).

28 See Lange (1936, 1938) and Lerner (1944).

29 See Arrow (1951), Debreu (1959), and Arrow and Hahn (1971).

30 It is, of course, quite possible that the favouring of the male children (see section 2) reflects hard-headed calculation by the family heads regarding the greater future earning power of the male children. Devotees of the "invisible hand" would no doubt see its benign presence in these distressing facts. But even if this were the only reason for the disparity, which I doubt, it would still be legitimate to distinguish between the returns to the family-heads (e.g., through support in old age) and the returning to all members of the family (including, of course, the family heads).

31 See especially Deaton and Muellbauer (1980, chapter 8), who also discuss the earlier literature.



family, of (ii) with direct concentration on the welfare of the family, without invoking individual welfare at all. For reasons already discussed neither assumption is easy to justify.

Much of economic analysis proceeds on the basis of linking decision taking with individual well-being. Disparities within the family strike at the root of this relationship.

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